

THE LADIES' ROAD

BY

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To

MY MOTHER

This last thing that we shared

'There *is* no height, no depth, could set us apart'

THE LADIES ROAD

Chapter I

THE TWO houses, seen in the mirror of childhood's memory, had an almost equal magic and enchantment. They were so much a part of one's life that it was hard indeed to separate them, although actually so great a distance to be measured in miles, lay between them. In that mirror in which things looked small and strangely clear and yet an immense distance away, Cappagh stood framed against its background of dark trees and the mountains beyond, with the lake in front and uncertain sunlight in the windows. The uncertainty was part of that memory of Cappagh, a world of surprise and adventure where anything might happen.

Winds on the other hand was Winds, and indescribable. One never tried to describe it Even Cynthia, speaking of it, only conveyed in Cynthia's voice everything that the house held, a whole life and everything one loved.

It stood against its background of ordered English country, so different from the background of Cappagh, between the Downs which in the evening were the same green yellow as the stone of which the house was built. When one saw it, coming home across the Downs about the time that the sheep were growing mysterious and the small narrow sheep paths ran a little way and were lost, and the line of the hill sharpened against the sky, the lights would be lit in the window glowing rosily The first light would be in the nursery where Nanny would be sitting sewing by the fire. The nursery was part of the security of Winds There was an indefinable magic about the memory of the house lit in the green dusk. It was Winds and part of childhood. It held Stella's life and a small secure world: Godfrey and Cynthia and David and herself and Nanny, and the nursery in which the last

childhood had been hers and David's, and Nanny sitting sewing by the window in summer or by the fire in winter and Nanny's black pussy (who must have been replaceable since one black pussy could not have lasted through the endless years of childhood). It was secure, as unshakable as faith. The nursery walls with firelight on them shut in the first world Stella had known. It held Nanny and herself and David, and Nanny's black pussy and the screen covered with shiny coloured pictures, cut by someone with great industry and patience from magazines. The screen perhaps was the first thing Stella's eyes had discovered, for it remained clearly in her memory associated with the nursery. She had lain awake on summer mornings in her small bed beside Nanny's larger one, watching the light come through the curiously shaped window in a gable which left the room dim and shadowy even on a summer day. When the light reached a certain point and it was still too early to whisper across Nanny to David, 'Are you awake?' it fell on the screen and she could see the pictures and make up stories about them, always the same stories with which she terrified herself, lying in the small safe world of bed beside Nanny. The king with a crown on his head and a long beard was a terrifying Bluebeard. A little girl talking to a dog as large as herself was Red Riding Hood with the Wolf, and so it went on. She had traced them in the daytime with a small exploring finger and the shiny surface of the pictures had been cold and rather frightening. Then there were the immense cupboards against the nursery walls, which in the half light of early morning might hold anything. Sometimes a mouse rustled, discovering Nanny's store of food, and Stella held her breath. Or one ran across the ceiling and made a funny little squeak like a bird, in the wainscot. Nanny kept everything in those cupboards, all the books and toys Godfrey and Cynthia had played with, as well as David's and Stella's, and dozens of neat bundles of scraps of material which

might come in useful some day. For Nanny belonged to an unmoving, unchanging time and there was no reason why anything should be thrown away when there was always room to keep it. Sometimes Nanny went to the cupboard and took toys from it to give away to poor children, but more must have come to fill their place, for the shelves seemed no emptier. And Mrs. Bates came, or a housemaid asking for stuff to mend with, and Nanny opened her bundles carefully, peering at them as though she was counting gold.

The nursery was always dim even in summer when it was full of the sound of the bees humming in the gable outside the window. The bees had built their hive there before Stella was born, and in the hot weather the honey melted and ran down the wall inside. In winter they must have gone to sleep, and instead there was the sound of wood hissing on the fire and Nanny's kettle boiling, and for some reason that memory of the nursery was associated with the smell of late summer and autumn, the faint musty smell of phlox in a garden when September has begun to fade it.

Later the world widened and there was the kitchen, almost as important as the nursery, and Mrs. Bates, the cook, only second to Nanny in the house and second to no one in the kitchen which she ruled. There seemed an unspoken understanding between Mrs. Bates and Nanny as though they stood alone among the rest of the world of young housemaids. The kitchen in childhood's memory was as secure as the nursery. It was always there with firelight on the white walls, glowing steady firelight from the immense range. No uncertain fire that flickered, climbing the walls and chasing the shadows, and then dropping back to let the shadows have their own way. There were fires like that, but this was not one of them. Stella thought once that the fire could never have gone out, until she remembered the kitchen in a grey dawn when she had gone into it for a cup of milk and a piece of bread and butter before an early ride. It had been dead then,

where their position was subtly different even from their position at Winds. There were hound puppies mixed up with the rest, a couple of hounds which Aunt Nancy was walking—a mysterious phrase which remained a mystery for quite a long time. The hound puppies went for walks with Stella and David when they stayed at Cappagh but Stella felt uneasily that if walking a hound meant what it seemed to mean, she certainly wasn't doing it. The puppies thrust their faces secretly and mysteriously round the corner of the box beside the hall door where they spent the days when they were not in mischief, and then seeing her come down the steps, their fat, wriggling bodies followed their faces. Still, doubt would fill them at the gate, round which they would push their noses in sudden terror, to see what lay beyond. Once out on the road it was comparatively plain sailing. They would run ahead joyously, their noses to the ground, their tails wagging. If they saw anything that startled them they might sit down and consider it, sitting bolt upright, their backs to Stella as she came up with them, their tails stiff with alarm. Sometimes they turned and fled before a flock of bullocks or a pony cart, never stopping for a moment until they reached home. Stella following, breathless and hoarse from calling them, would find two anxious wrinkled faces peering out of the box. Their ecstasy of relief at seeing her would be flattering. Never obviously had they hoped to see her alive again. One would bite her arm joyously to prove his relief while the other caught her skirt and ran away with it.

There must have been different hound puppies every year but in memory they seemed the same. They were always equally disobedient and quite oblivious of Stella's calling and shouting. Always she swore she would never take them for a walk again and then found their small rapturous brown and white faces irresistible.

'It's never dull walking with them,' Aunt Nancy said,

and did not seem to be alarmed by the possibility which alarmed Stella, that she might come home without them one day, and they might never be seen again.

It was part of the adventure of Cappagh which was always an adventure. It was not only that one went to it with Aunt Nancy, staying the night in London and getting up early to catch the train at Euston and perhaps having breakfast and lunch in the train, an exciting experience in itself. And then the boat at Holyhead with all its strange sights and sounds, the siren going, the gangways being pulled up, the seagulls flying above the boat as it moved, the blowing sunlight on their wings. Often that was all one knew. The rest was dim misery in a cabin with David lying on the opposite berth being sick too. And when David was sick he was cross as well and David's crossness was a terribly disconcerting thing, not only because he was David. He was nearly always good tempered but if he got a grievance he was not easily to be won from it. Stella made the best of the passage, and even once, recovering miraculously about mid-channel, recited poetry aloud until David told her to shut up and lay after saying it, with his face grey and sullen, as though, Stella thought indignantly, and reasonably, it was her fault that the sea was rough.

Once they travelled by night, a more exciting adventure still, and the sea was smooth so that they slept and awoke to see through the porthole the Irish coast bathed in sunlight. It was summer then and in Stella's memories of Cappagh it was usually summer. It was a place to which you came in the green dusk, half asleep after the journey, driving up the winding avenue and past the lake which lay with the woods about it, glimmering under the evening sky. The lake at Cappagh was mysterious. The reeds edged it and ran away into woods and there were small islands floating on it. It was always changing, whereas the lake at Winds was much clearer and more definite, more artificial. When David and Stella took a boat on the lake at Winds on a

summer afternoon and rowed between the islands they knew where they were going. At Cappagh one could never be sure of anything. In memory that arrival at Cappagh was always in the green dusk and yet there had been winter visits there when there had been snow on the hills and pink sunsets with the trees black against them. But the winters were less clear in memory than the summers when the evenings were long and quiet and green and endless, the dusk creeping slowly through the big house. The light lasted longer in Ireland, Aunt Nancy explained, because they were further west. And the door of Cappagh always stood open as often it stood all night. And the dogs welcoming them, moving and glimmering about the steps and in the dark hall, were part of the shadows. Uncle Hubert would shout to someone to bring a light but often without result and they would eat their supper in the dim panelled dining-room by candlelight with the windows open and the green dusk outside. And so climb to bed later with candles in their hands, through the immense shadowy house full of unfamiliar smells. The smells were part of Cappagh. The hall when you stepped inside it was full of them. But they were hidden in the shadows and you could not find them. At Winds you knew what you were smelling. Roses, sweet peas, the smell of the garden on a summer night coming through the open window. At Cappagh it was all elusive, uncertain. The woods about the house made it mysterious too. Stella used to look into them at night, half afraid. Did something move between the trees, a branch crack? It was only a summer wind coming from the mountains. She would undress in the twilight because she was afraid of bats coming in if she lit her candle, ever since a terrible night when a bat had flown in through the low window and knocked the candle over. She had screamed in terror for David and he had come heroically, lit the candle again and caught the bat in a bath towel and put it outside the window. He had not even laughed at her as he had not laughed when they

were small children alone in the nursery before Nanny came upstairs and Stella had seen horrid faces when she closed her eyes and had called out to him, 'David, I'm frightened,' and he had come awake, struggling with sleep to comfort her. He had never failed her.

There was an exquisite fatigue associated with that arrival at Cappagh and going to bed in the twilight because the candles were not necessary after all. Under Stella's window a path glimmered white running to the stables. She thought she heard a horse move in his stall as she looked out before getting into bed—an exciting sound. She and David would ride perhaps to-morrow. The tennis lawns lay quiet and mysterious between the house and the woods. Aunt Nancy had opened the door below the library window before they came upstairs, stooping her head because the window had stuck, and stood on the pale path outside and called back to them sadly that the rabbits had been in her garden again.

'You can't keep the little devils out,' Uncle Hubert said, standing in the window, his shoulders shutting out the last of the light. 'They burrow under the wire.'

Stella could see them from her window. The tops of the tennis nets and the marking lines showed faintly white. Across the lawn a small shadow crept to Aunt Nancy's border at the edge. Another followed it and another. They played joyously pulling at something and tearing it up on the path. Stella clapped her hands and they were suddenly still; again and there were tiny white scuts flying across the lawn to the darkness of the woods.

Something scratched and fumbled at the door. She went to it in her bare feet and opened it. Dora the spaniel came in and nuzzled her ankles, tickling her and making her laugh. Dora was as soft as the shadows out of which she came. The house was full of them, the last light fading in a green streak above the woods. They were scented shadows drenched through with a smell which Stella remembered all her life, the smell of Cappagh and childhood's summers.

Chapter 2

THERE WAS confusion sometimes between the two houses. Childhood was like that, a series of pictures and people with no link between. Often the journey from Winds to Cappagh dropped out. One was at Winds one day—the next one was at Cappagh. Even the seasons did not matter. One rode with Cynthia at Winds, a magical, enchanting thing to be doing, riding with Cynthia—summer riding which was so different from riding in winter. One could hear the wind blowing the grass, a summer sound, and see Cynthia's face framed against yellow fields and blue hills.

Stella kept it so—part of Winds and life. She lay awake in her own small room to which she had been promoted quite a long time ago, leaving Nanny alone in the nursery and Cynthia came upstairs after dinner to say good-night, to talk a little, to read a story. Stella heard her coming down the long passage and hid under the bedclothes torturing herself deliciously. What if the footsteps stopped and she never came? What if they just stood still and Cynthia never came again? And then Cynthia stood in the doorway with the summer dusk behind her.

'Are you awake, Stella?' and Cynthia's smile was like a shadow over her face.

Cynthia was like that and one's love for Cynthia which hurt in some strange way. Stella would sit up in bed quickly in sudden terror lest she should lose her even now, lose Cynthia standing in her pale frock at the door. Of course she was awake. 'Cynthia. You can stay? Don't go . . .' the terror of her going reaching Stella almost before the joy of her coming.

It was part of Winds, the room with the feeling of a summer evening, the window wide open over the garden; the chintz curtains drawn back, Cynthia coming in and

sitting on the bed and talking in her low voice. Sometimes Godfrey came, Cynthia and Godfrey together, standing at the door and smiling at Stella in bed. And Cynthia told a story, sitting on the end of the bed while Godfrey stood in the window, his shoulders outlined against it, and laughed sometimes at the story Cynthia was telling. And when they had said good-night and gone away one heard their footsteps going down the long passage.

Because there was no link, she stood the next moment at the garden gate at Cappagh looking in, and the bluebells were out under the apple trees like a blue sea (and only yesterday she had been planting them with Aunt Nancy, the earth incredibly damp and soft against her hands and one of the hound puppies thrusting his body in to hinder her). It was a mysterious enchanting garden, more mysterious than the garden at Winds which they all loved so much. One might hide in the Cappagh garden all day and never be found. It lay too low, Aunt Nancy said looking about it, and it was too big. All Irish gardens were like that—acres and acres of them. But it would be beautiful next year, lovelier even than this. She stood on the path between the bluebells, seeming to be lost in the garden, loving it more than anything or anybody in the world. And she was always homesick when she was away, she said, sick for Cappagh and her garden. Hubert said—she laughed a little—that she might have been the Creagh and not he, and that she was a Sassenach and had forgotten that. ‘Hubert is too used to it,’ she said, staring across the bluebells to the black branches of the apple trees, and her eyes seemed heavy with her love. ‘He was born at Cappagh. One has to come to it fresh to appreciate it fully.’ Stella must have been growing then for she understood dimly and remembered afterwards. About this time something was happening at Winds which was vaguely disturbing. Stella thought about it, standing at the gate of the garden at Cappagh looking in and the shadow lay over her face as

it lay over Cynthia's, but she did not know that. When she turned and smiled at Nancy Creagh, Nancy thought: 'They're all alike when they smile like that. But what does it mean?' and she stood staring at the bluebells and wondered about that smile which all the Mannerings had. It was melancholy, almost heavy, casting a shadow over a face instead of lighting it.

'And did they, she asked, her eyes considering her garden—and how lovely it would be next year with her new plants in her borders!—like Mary? She was lovely, wasn't she, in a way? Not as Cynthia was of course, but so tall and young and almost beautiful. She was, Stella said. They all thought so. And still, she wasn't sure that if she had been Godfrey, she would have chosen her, and could advance no reason in support of this conviction. And they were going to live in London, Aunt Nancy said, because of Godfrey's job at the War Office. Yes Stella said—in London—and sudden relief showed in her voice as though she had been frightened about Winds, about any change which might shake the security of Winds. But she was too young, Nancy Creagh thought, to know what it could mean, all the mysterious dangers of any change in such a life. And she looked at the grey wall about her garden as though she was suddenly frightened too. But she was sorry, she said softly, for Mary and Godfrey living in London.

'Mary likes it,' Stella explained. They turned slowly and walked up the garden path which climbed to the gate and dry land, leaving behind them the blue sea under the apple trees. 'She has always lived there.'

'One couldn't imagine it,' Nancy sighed. 'But there is Irene. She likes London. One couldn't have thought of her away from Cooperstown. She belonged to it. It seemed impossible, impossible to think of her in London. We all said that when she married George.' Stella did not know Irene very well, so she said nothing, and walking up the path between the grass borders to the house she only

thought that one couldn't imagine Cynthia in London. She thought of Cynthia while Aunt Nancy walked beside her. She often thought of Cynthia in this way, leaving whatever she was doing and going to a world which held Cynthia. She could walk beside Aunt Nancy at Cappagh and in imagination lie in bed in the dusk and wait for it to be lit suddenly by Cynthia's pale face at the door, and Cynthia's smile.

Nancy was thinking of Irene. She saw Irene standing on the gravel sweep before the grey square house of Coopers-town, with half a dozen dogs about her, or Irene on that black mare which was so like herself, or Irene against an Irish winter landscape, a wet road, dazzling one with the reflection of the uncertain sunlight as one walked or rode over it, and sad grey-green fields stretching to deep blue hills that had come suddenly out of rain vividly. Irene belonged to all these things. They must have gone even to the making of her.

There were changes at Winds about that time. The nursery had become Nanny's room and the bedroom at the end of the corridor which was in a corner of the house with one wide window looking down the path to the garden and another over the lawn to the park, had become Michael's nursery. Mary making the change had been apologetic, afraid of Nanny as they all were. And Cynthia had been a little shocked, standing in the old nursery between the great cupboards and looking at the screen which had been there in her childhood too, and at the rocking horse and the small beds either side of Nanny's big one. It was dark, she supposed, looking at the window. She heard the hum of the bees outside. She could remember the shape of the window in the early morning when it was getting light. 'We were all brought up here,' she said and looked at the screen again.

Mary said quickly that it mustn't ever be changed of course, that always it must remain just the same So only

the small beds went, leaving Nanny's large one rather solitary, standing out from the wall into the room, and Nanny sat by the fire in the winter, sewing, or by the window in the summer and the cupboards were still full of bundles and bundles of scraps which Nanny kept and the walls were a little more faded and shabby every year. One went to the nursery when one had hurt oneself or torn one's frock, or when one felt ill or frightened. There was always comfort in there with firelight and lamplight and the rustle of Nanny's apron and her stiff skirts which sounded before her as she moved. It was something unchangeable in a world that had begun to change. Mary and Godfrey came with Michael and Nanny was happy with the bustle of a nursery again, and then they went back to London, leaving the house strangely quiet. And David was at school and only home for the holidays in which he rode with Stella in the early morning or went shooting (although she had never liked the actual killing of birds or rabbits), or fishing on a summer evening which she liked best of all. She did not tell David that she hated to see a rabbit fall. There was some vague premonition, some fear already, of a life that might take him from her. She had learned perhaps with Cynthia who was away a good deal at this time, in London with Mary and Godfrey, or staying about with people. It was disturbing that going away of Cynthia's, but any day she might come home. Any night one might lie awake in the dusk and hear her running up the stairs and her step in the corridor and hear the door open: 'Stella, are you awake? Darling, I've come back I must only peep at you because it's late.' One slept after she had gone and awoke in the morning to sunlight shot through with the joyous knowledge that Cynthia had come home.

But David's going was worse because she and David being so much younger than the others had done everything together. It was lonely sitting in the schoolroom where she and David had performed marvellous cooking

feats over the fire, doing dull lessons with Miss Irving. She was going to school soon and that would be better. Cynthia had loved school and Stella expected that she would love it too. At least she wouldn't feel that David had it all his own way. She wouldn't be left. It wouldn't be so bad if she could go too. And then, while the question of school was still on the horizon, a wonderful thing happened. A boy at David's school got measles and all the others were sent home in the middle of the term, and it wasn't worth while when quarantine was over, going back. And Aunt Nancy came on her way to Ireland and carried David and Stella off with her. And there was the long journey and the arrival and the summer dusk at Cappagh which always had a magic about it and Uncle Hubert came out to meet them and the shadows were full of dogs, and they climbed to bed after supper through a house which Stella knew now, smelt of roses from the bowl in the hall downstairs. But there were other smells mixed with the roses, baffling her. She fell asleep smelling them and woke to the sun lighting the green branches of the tree outside her window and the knowledge that she and David had come away together, that for one long month—and in childhood a month is so endless that one need not look beyond it—David was hers.

They went fishing in the lake at Cappagh in the summer dusk and the trees that edged the lake grew blacker against an increasingly pale sky, and the shadows deepened. The air was full of the faint hum of insects which devoured them, so that afterwards Stella's memories of that fishing were associated with the feeling of scratching herself through the woollen jersey she had put on over her cotton frock because it was chilly at Cappagh in the evenings. The shadows lay across the lake making the water black. They crept towards each other as though they must meet in time, swallowing up the intricate pattern of silver that lay between. Now and again there was a soft splash as a

fish rose; or someone said something in a low voice. That was Philip who was home on leave, or Guy who had arrived with his arm in a sling, having had an accident on his motor bicycle. They were Stella's cousins. And there was Philip's friend Edmund Urquhart, who wasn't at all like him and didn't like shooting or hunting, but didn't mind fishing he said, adding that he hardly ever caught anything.

People talked in low voices fishing at this hour, and the shadows seemed to lie over them too and over their voices making them vague, indefinite. The lake lay below the house, a little distance from it, and the long avenue wound to it, making a circuitous way through the park where the cattle grazed. Once Dora, who belonged to Philip, found them fishing, and broke through the brambles at the edge of the lake, joyous and apologetic at once. She crept to Philip's heels as he fished and watched him anxiously before he discovered her, considering whether she should draw his attention to her presence or not. Philip, feeling her rather than seeing her (she panted a little in her agitation watching him) only said softly: 'Hello, Dora, you little devil. Quiet now.' And she held her breath showing him how quiet she could be. The woods were all about the lake and they were dark and rather exciting at this hour when one had plenty of company. Once Stella went fishing with Guy alone and an awful thing happened, for his fly caught in the sleeve of her jersey as he threw it, and twisted and embedded itself so that it seemed as if they would never get it free, Guy working patiently with one hand and Stella trying to help him, feeling apologetic and ashamed because it was her fault for getting caught.

When it was too dark to fish any longer and they went home by a short cut through the park, they could hear the bullocks chewing and one moved away before them, a dim great shape, its size exaggerated in the darkness.

Now that Philip and Guy and Edmund were there so that there were fewer empty rooms, the woods about the

house ceased to be terrifying. There had been a feeling of menace about that black wall beyond which one could not see. In the early morning the postman pushed his bicycle along the path through the trees 'coming over the mountain,' as Kate the housemaid explained. The sunlight went a little way into the woods, touching the trunks of the trees that were green-tinged after long winters and summers of rain, and edging them with gold. There was nothing to be afraid of on an early summer morning in such woods.

Chapter 5

EDMUND URQUHART walked in them with Philip and came out of them to stand looking up at the long grey wall of Cappagh. They had got up early, and the house looked still asleep with the sunlight on it—kindly and secure in sleep, Edmund thought.

He turned and looked at Philip and knew that Philip had forgotten him. He was looking at Cappagh too.

‘Philip loves it,’ he thought. And he hadn’t known before quite how much Philip loved it, until he saw him standing looking up at it that morning in the sunlight.

Since it is true that lookers-on see most of the game Philip didn’t see as clearly all that the house stood for as Edmund did, standing outside. It was part of his loneliness, the loneliness of someone who has grown up alone, not a part of any family circle, that he had that capacity for standing outside. He was a foreigner here in any case. He came to this new life with fresh eyes, and Cappagh in those days and the group of people who made the life of Cappagh were more clear to him than to anyone else.

‘You should be a landlord,’ he said to Philip. ‘A good landlord, to blot out the memories of the past bad ones. I suppose the Creaghs were always bad landlords and harried the peasants.’

‘Not always,’ Philip said and laughed.

Edmund Urquhart wrinkled his face fretfully. ‘I don’t know why you’ve gone into the Army. I hoped you’d sense enough to escape the family tradition. You’ll have a sword of course.’ He looked at his friend with an expression of horror which was half humorous. ‘And if there’s trouble here you’ll be shooting down these poor peasants. I shall be on the other side and perhaps you’ll shoot me or take me prisoner.’

Later, Philip, greatly content, took a gun and went out shooting rabbits in the summer dusk. He had always done that when he had come home from school on his first evening at home. Edmund did not accompany him. He did not like shooting. He said so one night when a neighbour, Sir Martin Shaw, had come to dine and talked at dinner of the grouse on the mountains which should be plentiful this year, and Sir Martin looked at him in bewilderment and said with great softness and politeness, 'By Jove.' He stared at him in an absorbed way, but he was really considering Edmund's hair and wondering when the fellow last had a hair-cut.

'He talks like a Home Ruler,' he said later to Nancy Creagh. They had discussed Irish politics at dinner, growing heated over them. 'Good Lord, I believe he is one.'

'Lots of people are nowadays,' she explained. Sir Martin had not changed any opinion in fifty years. 'Philip says it has got to come.'

'Philip's a soldier,' the old man said with sudden fierceness. 'I hope he doesn't forget that,' and flinched at once before her eyes 'I beg your pardon. I can trust Philip. Your son and Hubert's.' But he remembered afterwards that she was English, which explained everything, even Philip.

Edmund Urquhart sat at the very top of the mountain to which he had dragged Philip. The heather smelt strongly in the sun and the bees droned in and out of it. Edmund, who had a liking for comfort, had found a deep chair of heather into which he sank luxuriously.

'I think it's a pity,' he said. 'Your being a soldier and all that.' He looked down at the roof of Cappagh, a grey line beyond the black line of the woods. 'You should be a landlord.' He turned and looked at him. 'You'd make a good seigneur, Phil. And go into politics perhaps and atone for the sins of your ancestors.'

'I may do all that—in time,' Philip said, half asleep in the heather.

'If they don't kill you in one of their little wars, or a big one,' Edmund said gloomily, looking at Philip's head and shoulders and wondering where the rest of him was. The heather hid him. 'He belongs to it,' he thought. 'I don't.'

David went shooting rabbits with Philip and Guy, and sometimes Stella went too.

'Do you like it?' Edmund Urquhart asked, meeting her a little behind the rest.

'No,' she said frankly to him.

'Come for a walk instead.' He looked at her thoughtfully. 'You don't have to go to bed early?'

'No, not for a long time yet.'

They climbed the hill above the house

'I'd like to own a mountain,' Edmund said sleepily as they went through the bracken. He broke a piece of it, and held it in his hand to wave away the flies. 'Poor bracken,' he commented, 'beside Sussex bracken.' You couldn't have everything. Irish heather and Scotch heather were good. He flicked the piece of bracken about his face. Flies were worse in Ireland because of the damp. Aggressive Irish flies, he said aloud. Perhaps they knew that he was an Englishman.

They got to the top of the hill where the wind blew. It cleared the flies away. Edmund put his hands to his fair hair which blew about wildly. Stella had never seen a man with such long hair before. It was perhaps because he read poetry and even wrote it which David thought a rotten thing for a fellow to do, so she must think so too. But Philip didn't seem to mind, though you couldn't imagine Philip reading poetry or writing it. She was breathless, having kept up with difficulty with Edmund's long legs. He was very long and thin and he wrinkled his face while he talked. He was the same age as Philip, she remembered, but she thought he looked much older. That was perhaps

because he talked and thought such a lot. Philip didn't talk much, only laughed in that contented way.

They sat down on the ridge of the mountain with their backs to Cappagh, looking across the valley to another mountain and another. Below them, at the very foot of the hill, a group of white cottages clustered together. Smoke came from the chimneys above the thatched roofs. A donkey cart went slowly along the road between two mountains.

'The standard of living hasn't changed in the village down there,' he jerked his head, 'for fifty years, I suppose. Yet the Creaghs are good landlords. And the people are content.'

She looked at him with a sudden light in her face. If she was Irish, she thought, she'd be a rebel. She and David. A shot coming from the woods behind them might be David or Philip killing a rabbit. A shadow faint as one of the summer clouds above them passed across her face. (Well, it was over now.) And Philip, when he had come to stay at Winds sometimes for holidays while Uncle Hubert and Aunt Nancy were in India, had been a rebel too.

He had told them all about it first. They had longed for a rebellion and to fight in it. She sat up with her arms about her knees. She knew now that she didn't want a rebellion or to fight in it. She would be frightened. She couldn't even face the woods at night. She was ashamed. Looking down at the cottages, she supposed, clinging to a straw, that it wasn't as bad as one thought. The people seemed happy.

'Ten or twelve people living in one room,' Edmund Urquhart said, looking down too. 'Religion is founded on the resignation of the poor. All this will be changed, Stella—in your time. You will see it.'

He sat with his elbows on his knees, his face resting on his hands. Stella looking at him was dazzled by the sunshine in which they were both bathed. It caught all the

ridge of the mountain and the slope this side. The other side with Cappagh and the woods was cold and dark in shadow. She wondered why he had said 'your time,' as if it did not concern him, and 'You will see it.' She did not ask him. He seemed remote from her, lonely, sitting there, looking into the sunset, drenched in that yellow light. She had never, she thought, seen quite such a yellow sunset before. The group of white cottages with their thatched roofs were bathed in gold.

She had been impressed, rather shy of Edmund Urquhart. Suddenly she saw how young he was, sitting there in the sunlight, in his immense loneliness, the loneliness of someone without brothers or sisters, who has grown up alone. He was not much older than David, younger than Philip. He was still at Oxford and Philip had left Sandhurst last year.

She remembered that it must be late and she stood up stiffly and brushed some of the heather from her skirt. They went down much quicker than they had come up, and fell in with David and Philip at the gate leading from the mountain path into the woods. Two or three rabbits hung from David's hand as he walked. Stella looked away from them, but secretly. David, logically, would ask her, didn't she eat them?

Edmund said, 'Hello, Philip,' and walked beside him. Stella thought that the gun under Philip's arm seemed to keep them apart, nothing else—as though they were of one mind about everything else. The gun looked so cold and hard against the tweed of Philip's coat, and then he shifted it and carried it over his shoulder and his tweed coat and Edmund's touched each other as they walked on the narrow path. Stella dropped behind with David. Not even the rabbits, soft and still warm, dangling from his hand between them, should separate her from David.

The next day there was a tennis party and it rained. It always seemed to rain even in that wonderful summer

when people came to play tennis. A large part of the afternoon was spent in looking for balls. David and Stella indeed did little else. There was thick long grass about the tennis lawns and the balls went through the wire and over it and were lost in a green sea.

'A grand climate for growing weeds and moss,' someone said bitterly, searching, moving his legs in the long grass with a sound as though he walked through water. 'Here is one they lost the year before last, I expect.'

'Tennis balls are always like that,' Stella said eagerly, in her sympathy for his bitterness. 'You never find the one just lost—always the one before that or the one before that again.' She was quoting Edmund Urquhart.

Dora came to help them, swimming through the wet grass as if she loved it.

'Aunt Nancy has taught Dora to find tennis balls,' Stella explained. 'She's wonderful Philip doesn't like her doing it, though.'

Even Dora didn't find the ball 'Go on playing,' they said to those in the middle of the set and that was the first giving in that the ball was really lost, not to be found in a minute.

'Finish the set,' they called and the players agreed. 'We'll finish the set and then look for it while you play.'

'We'll have tea sometime, I hope,' Edmund Urquhart murmured, kicking his feet through the grass 'In relays and then search in relays. Why doesn't someone cut the grass and mend the netting?' He said it without resentment, thinking of tea, the most satisfactory part of tennis parties in a bad climate. He was greedy. The players ran and slipped on the damp court and the balls did not rise very well, and the doctor who was the champion player of the neighbourhood and always won the men's singles in the local tournament, said cheerfully: 'Getting heavy,' and sent a ferocious serve which never rose at all, so that his lady opponent gave a faint shriek and called out 'Too

good, Doctor,' and the doctor answered modestly, 'The ground, not me, Mis. Grace.'

Often there was a discussion, amicable, each side trying to give away a point. 'Through?' (there were many holes in the net). 'No, over. I'm sure it was over' 'Have it again, then.' The rain was a faint soft mist, warm and kind. They were so used to it that they hardly noticed, playing with their racquets wet in their wet hands, and the balls wet and their faces wet. 'After all if you didn't play in the rain,' someone said, 'you would never play at all.' And presently, tea was ready and the set over, and they went in up the steps and through the open door of the library. They had to stoop there because although the lower part formed half a door, the upper window which should have moved up and down, had stuck. 'The damp,' Hubert Creagh said, standing with his hands against it as though he tried to push it up while one of his guests entered. He knew that it was no use trying to move it. 'The damp,' he said, smiling at her so charmingly that she would have forgiven him anything. But she understood, of course. She had lived in the South of Ireland for thirty years. She repeated: 'The damp,' conveying to him how completely she understood and sympathised. They all trooped into the library where their clothes steamed a little in the warm air. But how good the fire was, they said, and yes, you always wanted a fire in this country. And there was nothing like a fire of turf and wood. But Irish rain never gave cold. Which was probably true, else few of them would have survived many summers, playing tennis in the rain. And they steamed, cheerfully, drinking their tea. And Hubert Creagh pretended to push up the window for the ball seekers to come in. (Dora, with the sense of her kind and her sex showing her what was and what was not worth looking for, had given it up long ago and was drying herself by the fire, a little mist rising from her drenched coat.)

The ball seekers stooped as the others had stooped at the

door, and Hubert Creagh said again: 'The damp,' as though he had just discovered that it was stuck. 'I must really do something about it, Nancy.'

Nancy, pouring out tea the other side of the room, did not hear him, but he addressed most of his remarks to her whether she could hear them or not, and he always looked her way when he spoke Edmund Urquhart, who did hear, knew that he would never do anything about it. 'I shall come here next year,' he thought. 'And there will be a few more holes in the wire netting, and a few more balls will go through, and the grass will be longer to catch and hide them, and we shan't find any of next year's balls, only of this year's which will be then last year's. And the window will have stuck with the damp and nothing will have been done about it, and nothing will be.' And he went to the tea table and took a cup from Nancy Creagh to hand it, and looked at her suddenly, liking her a little more than he usually liked her. And he thought, with great pleasure, standing in the warmth sent out by the wood and turf fire (what a jolly room it was with red covers and curtains and books round the walls), that he'd come here next year, and it would all be just the same.

And he looked at Nancy Creagh again, and as she was looking at him, their eyes met. There was great friendliness in hers. She understood him better than Hubert did, didn't wonder, as Hubert did, what Philip saw in him. She smiled at him seeming to take him into her confidence. They stood outside the happy steaming party looking on at them, enjoying their happiness. After all it was true that if you didn't play in the rain in the South of Ireland, you would never play. 'Some tea for yourself,' she said, suddenly and swiftly, handing him his cup. 'I thought you had some. I am so sorry.'

He smiled at her, taking it. He had handed on a cup rather absently to someone. He wasn't good at tea parties. He went presently and stood by the fire, having a liking for

comfort which he shared with Dora, and looked on at the party. He saw the life of Cappagh that summer, with its showers of rain and the sunlight between, and the tennis parties, against a background vivid with colour, the clear colour of the country after rain.

He knew that Nancy Creagh stood half outside as he did, but he did not wonder as many people wondered why she had married Hubert. He appreciated Hubert who stood out less clearly than his wife against this background because he was part of it. Edmund Urquhart thought, seeing it with fresh eyes, that he hadn't been prepared. He had come to Ireland and this wasn't Ireland, and yet it had the indefinable magic of the country about it. No one had told him about the life inside these houses, built so much of a pattern, big and grey with a suggestion of a fortress against their background of woods. They had been thrown down, he supposed, by the English as they passed through, coming as conquerors and colonists, and the English influence went just as far as the sunlight went into the woods and no further. Beyond that the country lay, unaffected. You couldn't tell inside these houses what was happening out there. And he looked through the window unconsciously thinking that. He stood warming himself by the fire, getting closer and closer to it, disturbing Dora who sat up and looked at him reproachfully, and finding him unaware of her, rose with great dignity and went to the far side of the hearth where she lay down again. In time he leaned his arm on the chimneypiece (when he took it away later there was a little dust of turf ash on the brown tweed of his sleeve), and drank his tea and watched the party from which he seemed to have slipped away so that they were no longer aware of him. The room, he thought, smelt differently from English rooms. He tried to define the smell and it eluded him. There were bowls and jars of summer flowers smelling in the warmth of the turf and wood fire and there was a smell of damp drying—the books ~~the~~

thought, glancing at the shelves, were probably as damp as could be, even though there was often a fire in this room. They ought to be taken out one by one, opened and left open so that the dry air could get between the leaves. But he was sure, looking at them, that they were never touched, except once a year perhaps, to be dusted.

The room, he thought, could only have been a room in an Irish country house. He had thought that in his bedroom lying awake in the morning and watching the furniture come slowly out of the shadows, the room seeming to hesitate like a sleeper half awake between two worlds. He had seen the sun creep between the leaves and light the trunks of the trees outside, and had watched the room come slowly awake. There was a mystery about it, an uncertainty. He followed something which eluded him, trying to catch up with it, leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, his body warmed by the turf fire. Then someone moved towards the door. 'It's stopped raining. What about another set?'

He thought wearily, 'I had better go and look for balls.'

Chapter 4

THE LAKE was chill and grey on a dull summer afternoon, the reeds the only colour against the grey. Good fishing weather, Stella thought. A swan moved across the still surface coldly and beautifully Aunt Nancy pushed the boat gently into the reeds and laughed, 'I didn't mean to do that, Stella. The boys would laugh at us.'

She turned the boat out again, let Stella row and laughed when Stella nearly wrecked them on a fallen tree that ran out from the bank. 'We're no navigators' They rowed away from the shore and its dangers. A little cloud of gnats swung and hummed in the air over the lake and broke before them. The sound reminded Stella of the bees in the nursery at Winds. They crossed the lake and slipped under the bank at the far side and drifted in the dark shadows of the woods that lay out over the water. Aunt Nancy facing Stella faced the woods too. Her eyes were dark as people's were in the winter when they had come in from hunting in a cold wind. But it was only the shadow of the woods, nothing else. It was such fun having David and Stella there, she said. It seemed such a long time since they had last been at Cappagh.

Stella's face brightened. It was lovely, she said, being here. And it had been luck that boy Williams getting measles. She splashed her hand in the lake because she was still at the age when water was an irresistible toy. But for that David would still have been at school and she at Winds doing dull lessons with Miss Irving. She gasped a little, thinking how narrowly she had escaped such a fate. She and David were grateful to the measley Williams she said and laughed. It was decent of him to do that just at this moment.

And then two people came suddenly out of the wood

and stood against the darkness which was like a screen behind them and their voices came across the water, and Nancy Creagh turned the boat, answering them.

'It's Irene and George,' she said. 'You've come to tea,' she called. 'I haven't seen you for ages, Irene.'

Stella thought, what a pretty hat Irene was wearing, such a soft beautiful blue rolled away from her face in that way, and her face was very white framed in her hat with the black woods behind her. Stella thought that whiteness most enviable and desirable and wondered if her face would ever be like that. And Irene's voice sounded beautiful too, calling across the water.

'We've come to tea, Nancy. But we're dreadfully late. And we've walked all the way.'

Nancy Creagh pushed the boat to the bank, and they got into it, and George, who was tall and thin with spectacles, took the oars and turned the boat round. He didn't talk much, rowing across the lake, but Irene explained that they had only just come over, or they would have come before. And now they were so late, and Nancy Creagh laughed and said that she hadn't known it was so late, and she was afraid she always kept Hubert waiting for his meals. 'We never thought of the time, did we, Stella?'

George bumped the boat against the bank the other side and held it steady while they all got out, and Nancy said : 'Run on, Stella, and tell them we are coming.' But this Stella was afraid to do, not wanting to face Uncle Hubert who had been kept waiting for his tea, although he should have been used to it by now. So she kept beside Aunt Nancy as if she had not heard and Aunt Nancy evidently forgot, for they all went in together (stooping their heads at the library door), and tea was set on the table beside the fire. And Hubert Creagh, who hated to pour out his own tea, had lifted the lid off and was looking into the teapot doubtfully. He turned as they came in, saying with great gentleness : 'Damn it, Nancy, must you always go away as

soon as it's time for a meal? The tea's been ready for an hour.'

Just an hour ago, Stella remembered, she and Aunt Nancy had gone to row on the lake

Then Uncle Hubert said, 'Hello, Irene, I didn't see you. I didn't know you were here.' And he looked at Irene with great pleasure and forgot to say Hello to George, for whom Stella began to feel sorry, for some reason she could not have explained.

'I married an English wife,' Hubert Creagh said to Irene, 'hoping to have punctual meals. And there is not a more unpunctual woman in the county. It was the same in India. As soon as a meal was ready she would go off somewhere. Never knew such a woman.' And forgetting Irene, he looked at his wife and forgave her everything. 'But upon my word, I am sorry for George,' he said, with apparent irrelevance, and Stella was conscious of a little shock, because she too was sorry for George, but she didn't feel somehow that it ought to be said.

'George is all right,' Irene said. 'I am quite punctual when I am in London'" and she moved towards the fire, beautifully as she did everything, and said, of course, you always wanted a fire here, and the smell of turf made her homesick. She stood beside the fire in her lovely tweeds and the hat turned back from her face, a strange soft, misty blue, the colour of her eyes, and she seemed to be warming herself as if she had been a long time cold. (That, thought Stella, was the reason why she was so pale. She was cold. But she ought to have been warm; she had walked through the woods) She moved her foot a little to touch Dora with it and Dora only half woke and slept again. She knew the best place on a grey chill Irish summer day when there was no work to be done.

Edmund Urquhart came in late too and stood for a moment at the door before anyone saw him, looking at them all. He had been walking, over the mountains, he said

vaguely as he sat down. He had stopped to talk to an old man on the road. The old man had told him there was going to be lots of trouble, lots of trouble, and he had shaken his head. And the boys were wild for it, he had said. Edmund comforted himself with hot cakes, butter and jam. They were as good at teas in Ireland as they were in Scotland. He had only discovered that. No one had told him before he came. He liked home-made jam too. And he was conscious of Irene's face across the table like a pale moon. He passed her home-made cakes and strawberry jam inadequately. It was so good, he said, and stared in amazement at George whom he suspected of being her husband.

Irene liked raspberry jam better, she said, and did not apologise for her taste. He felt humbly that he had been wrong. Raspberry jam then, he almost fumbled in his eagerness. Eating it, she looked at him across a hot cake, her eyes beautiful and expressionless. Was her hair black, he wondered, under her hat? He wished he could be sure. It might be the shadows. He had never known such a country for shadows, he thought with sudden irritation. They had planted the trees too close to the houses always. Why didn't they cut some of them down? He'd suggest it to Philip. But nothing, he knew, would ever be done about it. And they'd make cover if that old man to-day was right. He looked out across the tennis lawns, one above the other, to the woods beyond. You couldn't see anybody in those woods. But he came back to Irene's face and her eyes. And she spoke to him across the scone she was eating with raspberry jam. She heard they were drilling all over the country, she said. And there was a little thrill in her voice because she had just come from London and somewhere far back in her ancestry there had slipped in some Irish blood to mix with the conquerors. And that blood stirred a little now. But she could never let anyone know or she would be disgraced in the county. Nancy perhaps. She looked her way, hardly understanding her own feelings.

Nancy was English, which explained everything. They couldn't say that about her. The Coopers had been at Cooperstown since they came there with Cromwell.

The sound of a door-closing might only have been the wind, or the half-door they had left open when they came in, stooping their heads, moving on its hinges, or it might have been a door somewhere in the house. But Hubert Creagh looked at all the three doors that led into the library making the room draughty so that they really always needed a fire, and none of them told him anything. 'Look out, Irene,' he said and tried to remember if a servant had come bringing fresh tea or hot water, or had looked in to see if they wanted anything and gone away. 'Be careful, Irene,' he said, watching the doors which told him nothing, and she said yes, and looked too at all the doors and said she had forgotten; because she had only just come, and she hugged a guilty secret, half ashamed of it, half bewildered. What would George say? she thought and turned her eyes on George who was not looking her way. But Edmund was, and he blinked suddenly. 'My God,' he thought, 'she's in love with him.'

'There is going to be trouble,' George said gloomily beside Edmund. He picked him out, the only person in the room he could hope to understand. 'They don't take it seriously here. But it is going to be serious—everywhere.'

He added that after a little pause. Edmund knew he meant Europe then, not Ireland, and he thought with sudden rage and pain of Philip. For he was sure somehow that they were going to kill Philip. He was always afraid of it. And he didn't really care for anyone in the world except Philip. No one guessed his thoughts or the sudden despair with which he tore a scone to pieces in his fingers and dropped it helplessly, thinking of Philip. No one knew anything except Irene, who felt his trouble and did not know what it was. When he looked up, he met her eyes which had the shade in them of heather turned blue by distance.

It was clever of her to wear tweeds just the same colour, he thought. And he met her eyes which were full of sympathy for him, and he felt he would like to get out of this room and walk round the garden with her, and perhaps tell her, though he didn't usually want to tell people things. But they wouldn't go round the garden in a party breaking into couples as they usually did, because, Nancy Creagh explained to Irene down the tea table, the early summer flowers were nearly over and the other things, phlox and the rest hadn't come on. But Irene must see it later. She was going to stay, of course.

'Oh, yes,' Irene said, her eyes suddenly peaceful. 'George is going to shoot.'

And George said, yes, he was going to shoot. And he heard the grouse were extraordinarily plentiful this year. 'The trouble will come,' he said to Edmund, reassuring him. 'But not just yet. We'll get our shooting first.' And he looked at Edmund through his spectacles and then across the table at his wife. 'Irene is happy here,' he said. 'Though she doesn't shoot. She never wants to move once she comes.'

Irene's lips formed a word. 'London.' She looked down the tea table, and out through the window over the terrace to the woods. Her eyes caught the darkness of them. She leaned forward a little, her elbows on the table staring past Edmund into the woods.

'London,' he repeated quickly, showing that he at least understood—out of all these others that he at least . . . 'Oh, I agree . . .'

She did not answer, leaning forward, her eyes lost in the darkness of the woods. And he thought despairingly, 'She's lost in them. She's not here at all. She belongs to them. And George has taken her to London. It's too awful. It ought never to have been allowed. She ought to have married Philip.'

This was the greatest compliment he could possibly have

paid her. And he went on to think that Cappagh would have been safe then; although there was no reason why he should have thought that, for on that grey summer afternoon the solidly built house, shut in by its woods, seemed as safe as any house could well be.

'You'll stay to dinner, of course,' Nancy Creagh said to both of them. 'And we might have a game of tennis. The court must be dry, because it hasn't rained since this morning.'

Irene, coming back with difficulty only half way from the woods, still leaned her arms on the table and her eyes met Edmund Urquhart's. She stayed there with Edmund as though the woods still pulled at her, and she might at any moment slip back to them. She had no tennis things, she said, looking down at her tweeds which were the colour of heather close enough to be only faintly blue.

'We can lend you things,' Nancy Creagh said, naturally. But they had to get back. They had promised Father. He hated to dine alone. And he didn't like people coming in in a fuss at the last moment and not changing Nancy knew. She turned her eyes to her at last. He had always been like that. So they went away just as Philip and Guy came in with David. They had been fishing over the other side of the country. They all shook hands and sat down to tea and stood up again as Irene and George went.

'Had tea?' David said, beside Stella, and helped himself to all that Edmund had left of strawberry jam. He looked into the pot. 'Greedy fellow Edmund is,' he said.

Stella had had one tea, but she might have another. At this age it seemed as if she could eat endlessly. Philip went to the window and swung open the two doors and said to Irene, 'You'll have to stoop, you know. The window stuck when we were children, Irene.' Edmund Urquhart, standing against one of the curtains as though he hid in it, started hearing Philip using her name like that, so easily

'I remember it,' she said, looking at Philip and

thought enviously, they remembered lots of things together. He felt suddenly lonely.

She stooped her head going out before him and he followed her, leaving Philip in the library, where fresh tea had been brought and new logs put on the fire and the kettle hissed cheerfully. Edmund would put them across the lake, he said, and bring the boat back.

'Not drowning us?' she laughed at him for the first time, and the colour of her eyes was not too far away.

'Not drowning you,' he said. 'I am quite competent. Unexpectedly.' He rowed at Oxford, but that was unexpected too. He said again, as though it was a pleasant prospect: 'I'll put you across and you can walk through the woods,' and more slowly he finished, 'And I'll bring the boat back.'

They walked into a belt of pine trees that edged the park. The pine needles were under their feet, and it was dark. In the darkness he wondered, walking beside her, why she had married George.

Chapter 5

HE PUT them across the lake, which took only a minute, however slowly he rowed. He rowed as slowly as he could, and the soft splash of the water against the oars showed how slowly the boat moved. Running it against the bank at last, he held out his hand to Irene unwillingly, and when they stood above him on the bank saying thank you and good-bye, he sat in the boat holding the oars and thought : ‘They’ll be gone in a minute,’ and all the grey still water about him was cold with his loss. The shadow the trees made at the edge, and the roots of the trees standing up out of the earth where a flood had left them, were part of it. They were black under the bark, creeping over the frightened water. He sat straight and leaned back his head and looked up at Irene, who stood above him on the bank. He said, not at all, because she was thanking him. He had loved putting them across. But he wished they could have stayed for tennis ‘The court will be quite dry now,’ he said. ‘It hasn’t rained since this morning.’ And he meant that quite seriously, quoting Nancy Creagh unconsciously. ‘It won’t rain again,’ he said, turning and searching the lake across the still surface to the moving shadows at the edge ‘Not to-night.’ And with the sudden wild hope of a child, he splashed an oar foolishly in the water. ‘You couldn’t stay after all? Couldn’t you? They’d be so pleased if I just brought you back. We’d have had the row across the lake.’ He laughed at Irene despairingly. He thought, with that overwhelming loneliness, of the things she and Philip could laugh over together easily, in a room full of people. ‘We could send a message.’ The oar was still in his hand and he sat and stared at it. No telephones, of course. But a man riding on a horse—Connor, the groom. That would be a suitable way of carrying a message for Irene.

He had had no hope really. Only the momentary irrational optimism of a child, shattered so easily and quickly because there is no foundation to support it. She said she would have loved to stay. So *loved* to stay she said, drawing out the word to emphasise it. Her eyes reflected the cold grey of the water with the dark shadows on it. And the woods behind her caught all her body into their shadows. There was no colour of heather anywhere, made blue by distance. It was all grey and black, with Irene's face showing out of it as he had seen her first like a pale moon. George said they'd be late, and to Irene, the old man would be upset. And they had two miles to walk. And Edmund said, yes, he understood, and sat in the boat and heard their feet going away. A branch snapped, a dead leaf cracked. There were dead leaves then already to crack under Irene's feet as she walked through the woods. He felt as though it were October rowing back across the lake. A swan came to meet him and he teased it purposely and viciously with an oar, splashing it. The swan rose, fighting with the oar and ready to fight with him. The disturbance sent a thousand tiny ripples travelling to the shore, where they lapped against the bank and were caught in the black shadows of the tree trunks and the tree roots standing up from the earth.

He found the fishing party still at tea, and looked at them with the disgust of someone who has eaten well so recently as to be satisfied, thinking how greedy they were. 'You'll have to take some exercise before dinner,' he said to Stella.

Philip lit a cigarette. The horses hadn't been out. He was lazy, but if David and Stella liked and would take them easy. 'The mountain lane,' he said. 'We always go there in the summer when it is hot or there-are flies. The flies aren't so bad there. I'll come and help you saddle them, David, while Stella gets ready.'

'Shall I come too?' Edmund asked, picking a raspberry

from the dish on the table, and said at once, 'No I have had enough energy for to-day I haven't eaten like you.' He looked at Stella seriously, assuring her that he wasn't coming, wasn't going to spoil things. She wanted David to herself. 'I haven't made a pig of myself like the rest of you,' he said, looking at David and thinking of this friendship of brother and sister, which he had never had. Nothing could ever take its place, nothing that came later, or take the place of friendship and experience shared in childhood. And he saw again Philip's smile at Irene as he swung back the door for her. He went upstairs to his room which was over the library. It looked across the tennis lawn to the woods, and the reflection of the woods was in the mirror on the dressing-table, and thrown back from the mirror into the room. An old-fashioned flowery paper covering the walls was faded; the chintz curtains at the window were faded too, and the room had the faint smell of faded things which belongs to Irish country-house bedrooms. It was the smell of long wet winters and long wet summers following each other, leaving a dampness which constant fires of turf and wood could not altogether war against. The grey evening broke suddenly into pale sunlight, which came over the woods and was caught in the mirror and thrown back into the room as the shadows of the trees had been earlier. That would be better for their ride,"he thought, in the mountain lane where the flies were not so bad. He sat in the pale sunlight to read, leaning his arms on the table, his face on his hands, shut away in loneliness. He heard a horse move slowly out of the stables across the yard—being led—stop for someone to mount, and then the sound of two people riding out of the yard on to the avenue. He couldn't see them from this side of the house. They had gone the other way. Even their voices could not come back to him, yet he knew they were talking. They were always talking to each other, having so much to say. He wondered what would happen when they

grew up What did happen to a brother and sister, who had shared everything, when they grew up? They had gone away and the yard was quiet again, and he sat reading The trees outside were black against the pale uncertain sunlight until presently the sunlight wavered and the trees had it all their own way Then Edmund moved and thought it must be time to change. And he stared at the page where the printed words were as vague and uncertain as the sunlight had been. He hadn't taken in much of what he had read, seeing Irene's face above him on the bank, as he sat in the boat saying good-bye He wondered, standing up stiffly—he had better get to the bath before those kids came back—why she had married George.

They talked of her at dinner, with the windows open and candlelight, and the dim portraits looking down from the panelled walls Beautiful, Hubert Creagh said, but not a patch on her mother By Jove, he remembered. And Sir Martin Shaw, who had come over to dinner, remembered too They agreed, looking at each other—sharing memories, Edmund thought, as Irene and Philip had shared them—that she was beautiful, but you wouldn't have looked at her when Cicely was there. It seemed to Edmund that they said to each other a great many times 'I remember her mother,' repeating it, as though each time they said it they saw her again, staring at each other, sharing it Sometimes they varied, 'I remember the year Cicely came out. It must have been . . .' But they were vague about dates and their faces turned to each other, supplied no answer. 'My first leave home,' Hubert Creagh remembered. 'The Hunt Ball was at Derrick that year.'

Nancy Creagh sat at her end of the table with the window open behind her. The light outside was still stronger than the candles, so that Edmund could see most clearly the little mist her hair made about her face. Her voice coming into the discussion was cold and sweet. Cicely must have been beautiful, she said, if she was more beauti-

ful than Irene. And she leaned towards Edmund Urquhart as though they were both shut outside something, in a loneliness that made a bond between them. Didn't he think so? she asked. And for her part, she did not believe that Cicely had been more beautiful. It was only that there was about her the glamour made by time. And she looked at her husband and Martin Shaw, half tolerantly, half pityingly, old men or children making fairy tales to play with. And hearing the cold sweetness of her voice, they tumbled out of the past, hurting themselves a little as they fell to earth, and blinking rather foolishly in the candlelight. And they talked of other things, not looking at each other any more. But Nancy Creagh herself brought the conversation back to Irene. She didn't mind Irene, Edmund thought. Only the past from which she was shut out. Which was true. She sat in the candlelight, which grew stronger as the light behind her faded (presently the little mist would be about her face instead of round her hair), and looked between the heavy silver candlesticks, across a bowl of yellow roses, at Hubert, who, with the panelled wall behind him, sat in candlelight. She wasn't afraid of anything living, only of the past in which Cicely appeared, a beautiful ghost. No one, she thought, could have loved Cappagh or Ireland more, and she leaned forward a little under the burden of her love. None of them, she knew, felt for every inch of the land what she felt. Not Hubert, who had been born here—not Philip or Guy. And she heard a rustle in the ivy outside the window, and turned her head a little and saw the pale path going down to the garden, and the trees edging it, growing shadowy. And she seemed to Edmund Urquhart watching her, to go away from them out of the candlelight, leaving them to talk of Irene. He wondered where she had gone to alone, leaning back in her chair, her face turned a little sideways, her head and her shoulders caught into the shape of the window becoming dimmer . . . leaving them all sitting about the table with its flowers and

silver and its lights, to talk of Irene, and if they would, of the past and of Cicely, a pale ghost who could not hurt her. She was only thinking of her garden as it would be in the dim light, and that the phlox would be out soon and how lovely her border would be this autumn with the new chrysanthemums. And she was built into security with her love of Cappagh and her garden.

He followed her into the drawing-room after dinner, leaving the others to smoke. They had all, except Philip, who knew his ways already, been a little shocked to find that he did not smoke David, who had blinked sleepily at dinner, not understanding anything (he was still in the mountain lane where there had been lovely stretches of grass beside the road and the flies had been much better at least than anywhere else), had said good-night and gone up to bed. They heard his stumbling footsteps going up the stairs and down the long corridor above their heads. The fire had died down to a smouldering pile of ash. It was a way turf fires had, Nancy Creagh said, kneeling by it. And it covered everything with ash—he would see—a little layer of dust always on the chimneypiece. She put her hand up, touched it, and showed it to him on her finger. You couldn't get Irish servants to dust every day. They hated monotony. But in an emergency they were wonderful. If one could have an emergency every day, she said, smiling back at him over her shoulder

‘You will,’ he said, ‘please let me do this.’ And she stood up unwillingly.

‘I shall have to instruct you. I learned to make a turf fire when I came here first.’ She instructed him and watched him pile the turf on end, carefully.

‘That’s right’ A sudden flame sprang up as turf and wood met on the burning ash. ‘When I married Hubert,’ she went on as if she had not interrupted herself, ‘and I had to learn a lot of things—being English.’

‘Like George,’ he said.

'Like George.' A blaze of firelight lit up her face. 'Poor George, I am sorry for him.'

'So am I.'

'But he carried off Irene.'

She watched him frankly in the firelight. She had seen him look at Irene. 'It shouldn't have been allowed,' he agreed, staring into the fire. 'It was all wrong. Irene in London. She belongs here.' And he thought again that she should have married Philip.

'The odd thing is——' She knew he wasn't going to like it, and that he probably knew already and that in any case he would know. He wasn't like Hubert or Philip or Guy, who would never know, being silly men or children. 'She loves George,' she said, seeming more to agree with him than to make a statement herself; referring to something that they both knew already, but that the others couldn't see, being slow and stupid. 'George came here from England, fabulously rich, and Irene married him,' she said. 'She loves George and he adores her, and he gives her everything. And we all feel a grievance because Irene is so beautiful and George is very English and couldn't expect to understand her. And she always comes back a little frozen and warms herself beside a turf and wood fire.' She took a bellows and blew at the flames and they both saw Irene standing there in the firelight in her tweeds, the colour of heather on distant hills. But she wondered what those tweeds of Irene's had cost and thought that it was a good thing that George was very rich, because you couldn't think of Irene as poor. And Edmund saw her in this room and thought she ought to have married Philip.

They were interrupted then. The sound came through one of the open windows, and Nancy Creagh, hearing it, ran across the room and flung all the other windows in the bower open, leaning out. He followed her, listening. He hadn't been sure what it was. A child crying—but there was no child to cry . . . a ghost?

'It's in the woods,' she said, her hand on his arm. 'Out there beyond the lawn,' she indicated vaguely. 'In the darkness. Shall we ever find it?' And they were in the library which was dark with a faint glow on the hearth where the fire had been allowed to die, and a line of light showing under the door from the dining-room where they still talked . . . of Irene perhaps . . . of Cicely? She fumbled with the half door in her haste, passing by that line of light. She had forgotten them, thinking of what was happening in the woods. She was out in the darkness, running ahead of him over the grass which was wet with dew. He could smell it.

He caught her up and she explained as she ran. A rabbit in a trap—they would do it, although she and Hubert had done everything—searching for traps, finding them and breaking them, telling them they could take as many as they liked if they shot them. She was breathless, murmuring in his ear. But they *would* trap, and always there was the possibility some night like this, some summer night when one was so happy . . . And how could one ever have been happy when this was happening?

He wondered if they would ever find it, stumbling with her in the brambles. And pine trees made such darkness. No wonder the shadows lay over the house, crept into it through the windows, covering everything. He turned back to the light as though he could store it, carry it with him, and heard her cry behind him.

He stared at her in the darkness over it, knowing that she knew that he felt sick. He could not see her, but he could feel her there. He had a sensation of being in a conspiracy with her, their hands meeting over it, shut away together by the high wall the woods made, like a prison. He thought vaguely of the dining-room where the candles now would have it all their own way—perhaps they had shut the window when Nancy had gone. It was she who loved air so much. Were they still talking of Irene—of

Cicely? It seemed a long way away Philip and Guy would have known how to do this. He had to ask.

'Quickly. It is quite easy. The back of the neck Can you feel it? There's nothing else to do . . . but make sure'

So she couldn't do it, he thought, at once relieved and dismayed. Lots of country ladies he knew, could. But she knew how it should be done.

'I see now,' he whispered.

'The back of the neck Then we'll take the trap afterwards and break it. You are sure. . . .' She was terrified. 'You won't mess it?'

'Sure.'

'It's all right,' he said in a minute or two

They went back across the wet lawns, her skirts trailing over them. The fashions of that year were not suited for such expeditions He carried the trap, laying it down on the stone balustrading at the top of the steps. He was glad to put it out of his hands, hating it.

The library was still in darkness when they stooped their heads, only the line of light showing from the dining-room door. In the drawing-room she saw herself in a mirror and cried out She must change—and her shoes—she looked at her satin slippers—they were ruined He was wet too.

He found the candles in the hall and lit one for her, and one for himself, and they went upstairs through the dim shadowy house by candlelight. Downstairs in the dining-room they were still talking—but not all this time of Irene, he thought. Perhaps of the trouble that was coming. He turned on the first landing with the candle in his hand. The staircase window framed pale light and soft shadow, black trees against a green evening sky. The black wall of the trees shut the house in, guarding it A faint smell came to them from the hall below and through the open window, outside which a sleepy bird whispered. There was a late crop of hay lying cut in swaths in the meadow in

front of the house. The smell of it was elusive like all those other smells. Nancy Creagh standing and looking back at him defined one of them.

'Do you smell my roses? There is a bowl of them in the hall.' And she was suddenly happy over her roses, forgetting the small thing that had been caught in pain. 'You will change now. You must be so wet. I shall only be a few minutes.'

The candlelight threw soft shadows over her face. He kept her afterwards in memory standing so with the dusk glimmering palely behind her, at Cappagh which she loved and to which she belonged, although she had come into it from outside. She had flashed a smile at him in the green dusk and when the door had closed, he had been left in a shadowy world pursuing that something which he never found. Always he was coming up with it, only to lose it. He could put out his hand and close it on something as intangible as air. The smell of an Irish country house as one went up through it in the twilight. The smell of hay drying and damp walls drying and turf smoke and roses. It was all so like and yet so unlike an English house, where he could have come up with the thing he pursued. The black wall of the trees softening now against the sky where the last of the daylight was turning yellow made a barrier shutting out the country in which the house was built. Ireland lay beyond the trees, and you couldn't tell inside these houses what was happening beyond the barrier. He stood between two worlds, in a world which belonged to neither. Pursuing something and losing it, his hand closed at least on the roses of which the house smelt, the petals soft against his fingers and wet with this morning's rain.

Chapter 6

WHEN Edmund Urquhart met Irene again it was at Victoria Station. A train had gone out before they saw each other because there was no room to see anyone before the train went. And when they met, each going out into the cold winter sunlight, their faces had the same expression of people left behind. Only there was a difference. She had worn, like all the women on the platform, a look of strain, leaning forward, following the train as long as possible. Then that following look gave way to one of patience. But he still followed the train in his mind. He was left behind also, but only for a time until he could go too. She saw that in his face, although he did not look back as they walked together out of the station. She envied him.

'The train was crowded,' he said, walking beside her across the station yard. A cold wind blew in their faces and she bent her head a little before it. She looked frozen, wrapped in her furs. He thought of a fire of turf and wood that might have warmed her. But perhaps not even that now.

She hoped, lifting her face to the wind, that it wouldn't be rough to make things worse. They turned and looked at each other. George was a bad sailor, she said. The last time he had gone out there had been a terrible crossing. Everyone had been sick. It seemed the last touch of misery. And lifting her face in the cold sunlight, she seemed to be praying for the mercy of a smooth crossing for men who needed mercy.

"Will you come and have breakfast somewhere?" he asked. "You haven't had it?"

A cup of tea. She had had breakfast a lifetime ago. Where should they go? She shied away from the Grosvenor Hotel, where she and George had spent the night. She did

not say that, but he guessed it. They had lain awake talking; slow, heartbreaking, difficult talk, trying to remember things that must be said, to leave nothing undone, no lack or hurt not to be filled or healed afterwards. There had been, for her, a harrowing association with her childhood, she and her only brother talking in the nursery. Towards morning George had fallen asleep first, and she, left alone in immense loneliness, had followed him. But she had slept fitfully and she had had to wake him when the cold early light came, and it had been hard to wake him.

She said with frozen lips, 'It's worse in the early morning. The Staff train must be much better. You were seeing someone off?'

'Philip.'

They went into a hotel, found the dining-room and sat down at a table in the window. He ordered breakfast. Wouldn't she? He knew she had eaten nothing. George would have another breakfast on the way probably. It was always better when the train had gone for those on it, he said, almost brutally. Tea then, if she wouldn't. Across the table they saw each other clearly for the first time. She had been seeing only George, he Philip. She said, 'I recognised you at once.'

'And I you.' She had taken off her coat and he looked at her frock and remembered her tweeds. 'I don't even know your name,' he said. 'Do you know that? They always called you Irene. I have always thought of you as Irene.' But he hadn't thought of her—very much because the War had come and there had been Philip.

She told him her name, Irene Marsham. She had once been Irene Cooper and had belonged to Cooperstown, a great square grey house, dropped down on the land which Cromwell had taken from the Irish. And then she had married George. He knew that. But he had forgotten George's name. He was only an accident. Irene belonged to Ireland and to Cooperstown.

'So Philip was on that train,' she said wearily. She felt suddenly that if she could go to bed she would sleep for a week and perhaps forget the lifetime in which she had tried to wake George and always he had slept again, his head against her shoulder. She could feel the weight of it now. 'In a minute,' he had said heavily, opening his eyes and closing them again. 'It isn't time to get up, is it? Just a minute,' like an apologetic child. 'I don't know why I am so tired.' And she had had to wake him in the end, denying him the extra minute he pleaded for—had had to force him awake because the train went at half past eight. 'If I had had a Staff job, Irene,' he had said, turning to her as he shaved, 'we'd have had two or three hours more.'

She looked at Edmund Urquhart across the table.

'It was in Ireland,' she said 'We were so happy. We played tennis.'

'No, we didn't,' he recaptured the happiness (But a rabbit had cried in pain, caught in a trap) 'It always rained.'

'But you rowed us across the lake,' she remembered. 'And we walked home through the woods. You've cut your hair,' she said ridiculously, and was able to laugh a little.

'An Army barber,' he explained, running his hand over it.

He sat facing her with his back to the window. He looked rather beautiful in uniform, so beautiful that anyone seeing him must have known that he was going to be killed.

'So you were seeing off Philip,' she said 'I didn't know he was there.' She moved her shoulder curiously as though some weight lay on it, and was still again. She had not seen anyone except George. 'I expect he and George will find each other. I hope they will.'

They were sure to, he said. Coincidences were extraordinary. One hadn't to try and find people in the Army. One just knocked up against them.

'But you are in Philip's regiment,' she said, looking at him as she had looked across the tea table at Cappagh. 'You'll find Philip.'

He sat still, crumpling his bread, looking down at it. 'I'll try to.'

'That's why you've done it. Not patriotism or anything.'

He met her eyes 'I expect I'd have done it any way, although I am against it all.' But not so soon, he acknowledged, but for Philip.

'Well, you look very nice in uniform,' she said, and sighed. Where was the train now and George?

'Hubert is out already,' she said, remembering that last summer at Cappagh. 'Poor Nancy.'

'What are you doing?' he asked presently.

'Working in a hospital in the country.' She held out her hands. They were roughened and scarred by work, and he felt a shock looking at them. Irene's hands. They had been so beautiful. They were ugly now. He hated ugliness and he looked away from them secretly to her face. He wished he could see her again in tweeds at Cappagh. There was going to be so much ugliness he couldn't avoid.

'And you?'

'I've got two or three days' leave.' He didn't know what to do with it now that Philip had gone. 'I got my commission a month ago. Before that I was a private soldier.'

'Was it awful?'

He hid how awful it had been, smiling at her. 'I didn't like washing up . . . greasy plates.'

'Why did you do it . . . Philip?' She had always known. Long ago at Cappagh when she alone had been aware of his trouble.

'I thought I might get to France with him that way. He had so much start of me, you see. But I didn't, and then I was offered a commission and I was glad to get out, into

comfort. I never could have believed how comfortable an officer's life could be I enlisted from Oxford.'

He looked at her. She thought of Oxford and the sort of rooms he had left to become a private soldier. 'From Oxford,' she sighed seeing those rooms, feeling their quietness and beauty. 'It was too much to do even for Philip. When it is over you'll go back and write a book about it.'

She saw the rooms quite clearly, but she couldn't see him in them. Not in uniform—it changed people so. In ordinary clothes then. The rooms were empty. She searched them, suddenly frightened. He had not said anything, had not answered that sentence of hers. 'You'll go back and write a book about it.' But she knew suddenly that he would never write a book about it, and why, and that the rooms were empty.

He was remembering that her eyes had been the colour of hills with heather on them made blue by distance, and that she had worn tweeds the same colour (He did not know how endlessly and patiently she had searched the shops for that shade to match her eyes.) But when he had rowed her across the lake they had been grey with the reflection of the lake water, and it had been cold with black shadows everywhere, even in her eyes. He leaned his arms on the table as if he were tired too (he had got up so early to see Philip off), and he looked at her, and she was no less beautiful, but he wished she was warm again. He wanted warmth and beauty to carry away with him, and he did not look at her hands. He was angry with her suddenly for spoiling them, in a childish way. One wanted all the beauty one could get.

'You expect to go out soon?' she said, remembering how at the station he had seemed to follow the train without looking after it. She felt a weight against her shoulder, a weight too heavy for her to carry.

'Pretty soon.' He looked past her, beyond her, seeing Philip and the road up which Philip would go and

would follow But he must hurry to get there in time He could hear the minutes racing by. She saw his face and understood

'There will be plenty of time.'—For him, she thought desolately. Where was George now? She looked at a clock on the wall. Dover in two hours and then the sea crossing, quick if there were no submarines about. And afterwards the road. She saw it too. But she could not follow as he could

He followed it with many of his generation that spring. He went in company with his generation from Victoria by the early morning train. He had stayed the night at the Grosvenor Hotel with two or three other people of his own age They got as far as Étaples together. Then they were separated. He followed the road alone to the 1st Battalion where Philip was. He had wangled and fought for that patiently and he had achieved it at last. When he went up the road on a day of April his patience was almost exhausted He remembered, blinking his eyes under the peak of his cap because the road was white and glaring in sunlight, how Irene had said to him three months before in London, 'You will have plenty of time' He had not contradicted her, but he had felt the minutes racing by then. He had wondered always if he would be in time.

The road was broken here and there They pushed him into one place and another and left him there, as though they had forgotten him If he had had time, if he had not been absorbed in the necessity of getting there at once he would have seen the beauty of the road in spring. It ran across flat cornfields, white between them, dipped to a French village where the blossom was out in the sunlight against the white walls The blossom made grey delicate shadows on the white, faintly tinged with pink. There was blossom too against the grey walls of a house in an immensely quiet French town, through which the road ran. The War had never touched this surely, he thought, al-

though British soldiers filled the streets, although one could hear the guns. The road went on across the flat country to a château where he spent one night. There were thin woods about the château holding off the tilled fields as though they were an advancing army. The rather piteous woods were full of sunlight and shadow in April. He walked in them in the evening and in the overgrown garden below the long château windows which caught the reflection of the sunset, yellow against the grey walls. There were formal pools of water in the garden where the paths were almost lost, and the sun lit them for a short space and left them, like the windows, colder when it had passed. Edmund Urquhart, finding the lost paths of the garden, did not look into the water to see the reflection of the sky because he was altogether concerned with the sound of gun fire, a steady boom in the east, and as the dusk came, the flashes lighting the sky where the War was (and Philip).

He came to the end of the road at night, going up the line from Ypres with a guide who lost the way half a dozen times. He had spent the last night in the roofless Cloth Hall and had not slept because of the rats. He loathed them. They seemed more evil, more bloated here than any rats he had seen.

But he stumbled at last down the steep steps and fell into a dug-out where Philip Creagh was writing by candle-light on an overturned box which served for a table. And he said, 'Oh, Philip,' and laughed because he hadn't expected to see him so soon, to find him there as though he was waiting for him, and he was so happy and tired he could almost have cried. He took off his pack with the movement of his head and shoulders through the strap by which it hung, which had been so strange to him at first, but which was now natural to him as to all his generation. And he sat down on the nearest thing handy, which was someone's bed, dropping the pack at his feet. And he said, 'Oh, Philip. I thought it only happened in books. To find

you here!' And he laughed again foolishly, leaning his face on his hands, sitting forward to stare at Philip who looked back at him across the overturned box and the candle on it, with red-rimmed, tired eyes. (He had last seen Philip in candlelight when they sat at dinner at Cappagh with the windows open and the garden paths growing paler outside)

'So you're the fellow we're expecting,' Philip said, and blinked, and the candlelight threw odd shadows on his face which was a strange yellowy-green colour. The candlelight, Edmund hoped for a moment, before he remembered Philip's face in candlelight at Cappagh.

Then Philip laughed too, in his immense happiness 'Oh, Edmund, Edmund,' he said, and his voice was hoarse because he had been in the line a week And he couldn't think of anything to say, so he said, 'You're late,' and the words frightened Edmund because he had been so afraid of being too late.

'I've come, though,' he said, answering that fear. 'It was the guide. He lost us half a dozen times Wouldn't give in he didn't know. I could find my way blindfolded through the cellars of that village now over there. We went in and out, in and out of them.'

Philip had put down his pen and leaned back, tipping up the box on which he sat, with one foot against the box that served for a table. His face went away from the dim candlelight into the shadows. Edmund saw him at the dinner-table at Cappagh, leaning back out of the light, while they talked of Irene.

'They make a lot of noise up there,' he said, looking towards the steps.

'It's a way they have,' Philip said when it was quiet again.

'They made a lot of noise when we were getting lost. I thought they'd found us.' He laughed. 'That it was all for us.' He looked at Philip's rank badges which were visible as he sat straight again. 'Do I call you—Sir?'

Philip laughed and blinked his red-rimmed eyes which smarted and hurt him.

'When you come in to report, you should salute,' he said.

He said later, 'You've come at a good time. We're being relieved . . . almost at once.' And they went back into a French village where the apple blossom was out, pink against the white houses, and there were miles and miles of young green cornfields rippling in the wind, and there was nothing to do because they were in rest.

They went for morning rides through French woods untouched by the War, and the delicate green of the young leaves touched their faces as they rode. Thank God they had left something, Philip said, and his eyes seemed to hurt him less in here, where all the light was green and quiet. Presently, Edmund thought, he'd be able to open them again, quite wide. But he couldn't yet, and he rode with his eyes half closed, the lids over them, and only Edmund saw the sunlight coming through the trees and the formal beauty of the rides intersecting the forest like a geometrical plan. And there were cowslips under the horses' feet driven to flower here from the over-tilled fields. Funny how they couldn't get rid of the poppies which waved in the wind all through the young corn.

They talked of Cappagh, letting the reins fall on the horses' necks as they walked. Philip, perhaps, with his eyes half closed, thought himself at Cappagh, in the mountain lane where they took the horses in summer because the flies weren't so bad there. Philip said Guy was still at Aldershot and he hoped to God they'd keep him there. And Edmund knew he was thinking of Nancy Creagh and Cappagh. He too thought of Nancy Creagh and Cappagh.

'I've written to him,' Philip said, turning his horse's head with an almost imperceptible movement of his hand as the ride forked. 'He wanted to get to this battalion if

he couldn't get to Father's I've told him to stay where he is as long as they leave him there'

'He'll obey you?' Edmund asked, ignorant of this relationship of brother and brother.

Philip rode under a tree, into it, stooping his head. Coming out, he straightened himself, his head back and for a moment his eyelids lifted. There was sunlight on his face before they rode into shadow again. Yes, he said, Guy would obey him. After all, there was Mother and Cappagh.

After all, there was Nancy Creagh and Cappagh—and Ireland, Edmund said. And Philip Creagh, riding in French woods, said, yes, there was Ireland.

'But you belong to it,' Edmund said, riding in French woods, pale green and yellow in sunlight and seeing the black woods about Cappagh. 'More than Guy. Guy will make a very good regular officer.' He saw Philip lying in the heather at Cappagh, half-hidden in it. Philip might break through that barrier that the woods made, and discover what was happening out there and Cappagh then would be part of Ireland. Coming back from a dream, Edmund stared at a stranger who rode beside him, his lids covering his eyes as though he slept.

'More than Guy,' the stranger agreed, and he remembered that it was Philip who was riding beside him. Guy he knew would never break through the barrier.

'I saw Irene in London,' he said. She belonged too. He might almost have guessed that little thrill that disturbed her, and the Irish blood so faint and far away that had mingled with the conquerors'. 'I never told you.' How had he never told him? They had talked all the time, or he had. Philip had not talked so much, blinking his eyes as though they hurt him.

He blinked his eyes now, riding in French woods, in and out of a pattern of sunlight.

'Irene?'

Edmund was a little shocked. Irene Marsham. There was

only one Irene. But Philip had grown up with her and was used to her beauty. He said, oh yes. And he had met George on the train. Poor old George.

'She was at Victoria that day seeing George off.' He remembered that she had seen only George, he Philip; that they had both been shut away alone, left alone on the platform when the train had gone.

Poor old George! Philip had met him. As sick as a dog he had been. Started as he walked down the pier in sight of the sea which had been the colour of pea soup. The boat hadn't been a pretty sight when they arrived, the men sick everywhere. They had been glad to see France after all, pitying the people they passed going the other way. There was something to be said for dry land; and he picked a leaf from a tree as he passed, looking down at the turf of the ride which was soft under the horses' feet.

They shared a room in a French farmhouse looking out into a yard. Philip liked the yard, he said, even the smell of the cowsheds where the cows were up to their knees in filth. He was meant to be a countryman after all and not a soldier. There was a manure heap in the middle of the yard which smelt strongly too, coming in through the window when they had forced it open after much difficulty. Sometimes there were air raids at night, disturbing them, but there were quiet nights when they sat up talking, not as they had talked at Cappagh over a smouldering turf fire. It lay over the farmhouse room and over their talk, the indefinable atmosphere of a last talk, a last night. As though one of them was going away in the morning—but neither of them were going yet and when they went, they would go together. So they talked, not as Irene and George had talked, carefully, difficultly, forgetting nothing. Philip sat against the window, one arm along the low sill and Edmund hid in the shadows of the room (no lights were allowed to be shown), and watched him. If one of them had been going, one staying, it would have been different. There

would have been so many things to say then, to fill night after night of talk, remembering carefully all the things to leave to the one who stayed. But it did not matter since they both went and Edmund, who had always known about Philip, and who knew too now about himself (but he didn't think about himself, only that he would go with Philip), was detached from the life they had both left as though some connecting cord had been cut, and there was nothing now remaining that mattered outside this room where he and Philip sat talking as people only talk when it is a last time.

Philip said once: 'I don't know why you did it,' and he stared out of the window at the manure heap which was a great black shadow in the moonlight, and he was almost irritable. 'I don't know why you did it,' feeling perhaps that there would have been something left, someone to leave things to. But Guy was still at Aldershot, he remembered. He hoped to God they'd keep him there

'You used to say: "You'll have a sword,"' he said, and laughed with his face against his hands so that his hands broke his laughter and made it sound as though he cried.

The May night was beautiful outside, beyond the manure heap. He could smell the milky smell of the cows knee deep in filth. The open door of the cowshed was silver in the moonlight, cut across with a black shadow. One of the cows lowed softly, chewed and slept again.

'And now you've got a sword, too,' he said ridiculously, turning back to look for Edmund. He couldn't find him, in the darkness. 'You used to say, "I'm not a man of action," and you let your hair grow. And now they've gone and cut it off.' He was rambling sleepily, stupidly, like a child. It did not matter because he was not leaving anything, nothing to be said carefully, to be explained so that there should be no mistake when it was too late. He could ramble, talk nonsense like a child if he would. Nothing would be left in this room of what they had said when they

had gone. But Guy was still at Aldershot, he remembered, and he had had a talk with Guy.

'If I don't come back,' he had said. They had sat in his club in Piccadilly looking over the Green Park and they had gone together in and out of the rooms at Cappagh. They had climbed the hill through the bracken and stood in the heather and looked down at Cappagh village. 'It's all wrong,' Philip had said. 'I'd have seen that even if Edmund hadn't shown me. Father will agree There'll be enough money although not very much And there's that empty gate lodge at the end of the back avenue It wants doing up; then I'd like Murphy to have it. Father and I talked about it before he went out.' (Now he was talking to Guy before he went out.) 'If he's killed with me, Mrs Murphy's to have it, anyhow She might move in as soon as the repairs are done, don't you think? And she and the children will want looking after.'

'Assuming you are killed,' Guy said, a schoolboy still facing things. He looked his brother in the face, met his eyes and faltered suddenly.

'If I am killed,' Philip said to comfort him. And everything being settled, they thought together of the lake at Cappagh and fishing in the summer dusk and heard the gnats buzzing and the little splash of the water as a fish rose And Dora found them fighting her way softly through the brambles, and loving them, and watching them, full of doubt 'Father ought to be all right,' Philip said, and both thought of their mother and could not face each other with that thought. 'Comparatively few commanding officers are killed—in France, anyway'

And that said, they went home with their basket of fish (not a very full one) and Dora at their heels, across the park in the dusk.

Now he was with Edmund and everything was settled and they were leaving nothing and their detachment was as great as though they were already dead and looking back

on a life they had left. Philip talked of Ireland for almost the whole of one night. He had meant one of these days to leave the Army and go into politics. But it would have taken some doing with his father, though he would have come round.

'I don't know that I'd want to see you in Irish politics after all,' Edmund said, suddenly frightened. Better leave Cappagh as it was, a world of its own between two worlds, kindly and secure as he remembered it with the sunlight on the grey walls 'They have a way of breaking people in that country of yours A good landlord. That's another matter'

Philip did not argue because it didn't matter now anyway, and they talked of Cappagh in this room where other men had talked last talk and nothing of it had been left to show what men they had been.

They went up to the line on a June day when a faint summer wind moved the young corn like water. Philip, commanding a company, because promotion came quickly and his pre-war soldiering counted disproportionately, rode a horse, while Edmund walked. So they could not walk side by side as they had walked in Ireland when only the gun under Philip's arm seemed to separate them.

Nothing separated them now. They were both killed the same day in a Brigade affair.

Chapter 7

NANCY CREAGH, weeping for Philip, wept for Edmund too as though she had lost two sons. She had so much sympathy and imagination that she had lost many sons before her own Working in a canteen in London she washed dishes and served food to hungry men and thought of Hubert. She slipped away from what she was doing as she had slipped away from the table at Cappagh, going to Hubert in France. She became selfless, lifted above pain for Hubert's sake as though Philip were only Hubert's son. She tried to write and broke off How could they write sympathy on such a subject to each other? Hubert's letter, helpless, only showed how much he wanted her He wrote of 'the boy' and the words were blurred And he wrote in haste in the middle of an attack But he would get leave soon.

All her pity was for Hubert those days—Hubert wanting her comfort which he had never lacked before in twenty-five years Stealing a moment from Hubert, as though she actually left him, as though wherever he was, he must feel her going, she thought of Edmund. Not for long, because Hubert was waiting for her and Edmund would have understood She looked at him across the drawing-room at Cappagh with a great friendliness and understanding. Or she leaned towards him down the dining-room table calling him to her aid. He stood outside with her looking on at those children of hers who needed her Hubert, Philip and Guy. He would have told her to go since their need was greater than his. She came to think of Philip and Edmund together (they had been killed the same day, their names in the same list, and though she did not know that, they were laid in the same grave by a burying party working in haste in the grey dawn of a summer morning)

In time, when she could leave Hubert she went to both of them and they were confused, Philip in Edmund, Edmund in Philip, although they had been so different. But each, she thought, had supplied something the other lacked, Philip with his masculinity, Edmund with his feminine quickness and intuition. She washed dishes with amazing efficiency, her hands moving and her body moving, and she was with Hubert all the time except for those moments which she could steal for Philip and Edmund who being together wanted her less. And then Guy came on leave wanting her, and she must leave them all for Guy who looked a child still in his uniform. It was now as though she had given away so much of herself that she no longer existed, could no longer feel pain. She wrote to Hubert about his leave. Where should they spend it? And she shied away in her thoughts from Cappagh as Irene had shied away from the hotel where she and George had spent the night. They both remembered an inn somewhere—in Sussex at the foot of the Downs where they had stayed long ago before Philip was born. They wouldn't be wasting time in trains and he could stay until the last hour. So they left Cappagh empty, lying a cold grey wall against the blackness of the woods (Nancy's garden was overgrown, her new chrysanthemums choked with weeds) and went to the inn at the foot of the Downs which was just as they remembered it. And they walked in the small Sussex fields, trying not to think of the wide fields about Cappagh, and climbed the Downs and talked sometimes about Philip, but not always. Guy coming from Aldershot for a long weekend was shy and embarrassed, and Nancy watched him, understanding as she had always understood, and was glad for his sake when he was gone, feeling too some burden lifted from her so that she could give everything now to Hubert. When Guy had gone, she and Hubert were left and Hubert looked so young and fit in his uniform that she often forgot, and she and Hubert were young lovers again,

and they held hands often as they walked in the small fields or climbed the Downs Sometimes Hubert spoke with difficulty, his face showing it, of 'the boy,' and she was confused thinking of Philip as a baby yet to be born And she and Hubert were only lovers, sufficient for each other, living in a world as small as one of these fields

She awoke to it in the summer dawn when everything was grey and drenched with dew. The roses that clustered about the window and looked in through it as though to see her and Hubert, small curious yellow faces, were drenched with it. It was on her hands and on her face, but afterwards she knew that she had cried in her sleep The dawn coming in, smelt of dew and wet grass and wet flowers, and her hands against her face were wet and cold. She looked at Hubert who lay defenceless in sleep, and lost that dream in which they had both been happy and young, and knew as though for the first time, that Philip was dead and Hubert going back to the War and that Guy would follow him.

She sat still with her face against her hands, and the small yellow roses watched her curiously and the sun came outside through a little mist between the apple trees in the garden, and Hubert stirred in his sleep. She knew he would wake soon, and she looked at the roses and made a movement with her hands as though she would push them out with all that they and she knew She held them off with breathless haste lest the knowledge should be in the room when Hubert woke. The sun was coming stronger through the mist. She was sitting in sunlight when Hubert came awake He saw it in her hair.

He talked of Philip that day as though for both of them the dream had come to an end There were so many things he had hoped for Philip, that he and Philip would do together A good man for his country, Philip would have been one day He had had a long talk with Guy (as Philip had talked). Both knew, hiding it from each other, that

Guy was not Philip. They had never shown it, never spoken of it, never faced each other accepting it. But they could not shut it out now. He had talked to Guy and Guy had answered, feeling too, miserably, that he was not Philip, but trying to convey that he would do his best. And relieved when it was over and he could go back to Aldershot, where he was out all day training and slept at night so heavily that he didn't think much. All that last day they talked of Guy, putting away Philip who was dead. And they reassured each other without putting it into words Guy was there, if he was not Philip. It was last talk, careful talk for one who was staying behind (Philip and Edmund going together had gone free.) Hubert had talked to Guy, but there were things he might have forgotten. She knew that it was very likely that there were things he might have forgotten, her Hubert, who was big and simple and not very quick. (Some people had wondered why she had married him; and Edmund Urquhart had thought 'Philip is her son') And she was sorry for Guy, who must carry such a burden, being unequal to it. She herself felt such supernatural strength that she could have held the world on her shoulders. She held Hubert, promising carefully, slowly that she would remember everything . . . if Guy should forget . . . if he should prove inadequate. She sat holding the world in her hands, exalted in her strength. She could hold them all, keep them, her children—Philip, Hubert, Guy. She would have taken Edmund into that world, but for some reason Edmund stood outside with her, looking on. And he understood and it was good to have someone to share things with as she had shared them, meeting his eyes across the room at Cappagh. When everything was said, lest Guy should forget, or prove inadequate, and (but they did not speak of that) if he should be killed too, Hubert said, 'We should have had a girl, Nancy.' He had always wanted a girl. He saw the yellow evening sunlight caught in her hair, and had an illusion that she was

her own daughter and then he said quickly what was the truth that he had never wanted anyone but her. She turned to him, shutting out everyone else, even Philip, even Guy, because she was content with Hubert, and they were young lovers again. But in the early morning when there was dew on the grass, a grey mist, and on the flowers, and her hands and face were wet with it, she had to wake him. And the small yellow roses pushed wet curious faces through the window to see her do it.

Irene read Philip's name and Edmund's in the casualty list, in a brief moment of rest between carrying trays and polishing brasses (this last seemed a stupid way of helping on the War, but her hands were quite spoilt now, anyhow).

She sat suddenly still with the newspaper between her hands, and a girl beside her lying back in her chair in an abandonment of fatigue, felt it.

'Someone you know,' she said sympathetically, turning her head.

'Yes.'

'Not . . . I hope.' She broke off, not knowing how to put it. 'There's an awful list to-day.' She looked at Irene's wedding ring. That sort of news came by telegram. 'A friend?'

'Yes.'

She did not say, two friends. Like Naney Creagh, she thought of them together. But Philip had been like her brother and for one grey summer afternoon in Ireland, Edmund had been in love with her. She sat, detached from the room, with the crackling newspapers about her (at any moment one of them might be still as hers had been, and one would know what that meant) and saw Edmund's face as he sat in the boat looking up at her, moving an oar foolishly in the water, and trying to keep her from the black woods that waited to swallow her.

When they had met in London, she had not mattered, not really mattered, although he had looked at her, seeing

her as he had seen her at Cappagh (she was wise reading such things in a man's eyes) Then he had gone back to Philip. Nothing, no one could push out Philip now And it was right, she thought, and her eyes burned a little which was a relief because she had been frozen, that they should go together. And she said good-bye to them and went back to George For, as Edmund had known too that winter morning at Victoria, no one really mattered now except George

She lived with other women, as women were living all over Europe in that strange isolation The fullness of her sympathy for the girl who shared a room with her, when her young husband was killed, was guilty with a sense of inadequacy It might have been George and this girl knew —everyone knew—that one's thoughts flew to that, even while one spoke words of sympathy. If it had been George —her God, if it had been George! There was no reason at all why it should not have been George, every reason why it should be George to-morrow or the day after. It was in her hands as she took the girl's cold hands and held them, trying to draw her back to a world where it had not happened But the girl's hands seemed stronger, trying to pull her into a world where she might be any day if it happened to be George And she was frightened suddenly, letting the cold hands go, escaping. They loved each other, these women, and hated each other at once, were in sympathy because they knew, and separated. Each one's safety menaced the other's safety. They, all of them, lived alone, touching each other and going back to that small world where they were shut in with some man who belonged to them. But once a woman, whose husband had been killed, looked at Irene with a strange pity in her eyes and that was terrifying George . . . she thought stupidly, lost before that terrible pity. Could she know? The woman seemed to be gloating over her safety, pitying all the helpless, defenceless women who were shut outside that safety.

Stella Mannerling read Philip's name in the paper before the news reached her by letter. She was at school, which seemed a silly place to be when there was a war on. But she hadn't been able to get anyone else to see it as she did, and so she was at Maythorpe where Cynthia had been and Mary too. Mary and Cynthia had liked it, but Stella supposed it hadn't been so bad then. She wondered if it had been so cold. The fires burnt badly and coal was scarce, and the long corridors were icy, and if you ran through them to warm yourself, you made a wind which cut you. It was torture too, practising in cold rooms and Miss Hill, the new music mistress, didn't seem to make music interesting as Fraulein had made it. But Fraulein had gone away after Stella's first term, and people said she was a spy and called Stella a pro-German when she said she had liked Fraulein.

She wasn't a pro-German, of course. She had turned rather white, facing the girl who had said it. 'My eldest brother is at the Front and my youngest brother is at Sandhurst,' she had said. 'How many relations have you got in the Army, Ruth?' And Ruth had been worsted acknowledging that she had only a cousin.

The War had changed school life apart from the difference it made in people to be always cold and always rather hungry. It had cut across friendships and formed others. Things that had mattered enormously, playing the same games, and playing them well, didn't matter any longer. Groups of girls personally concerned got together to talk about the War. Those not concerned were shut outside. Stella read a newspaper when she was supposed to be practising, and in it she read Philip's name. She had turned almost carelessly to that list wondering if there was anyone she knew. There was a certain excitement about seeing the name of someone one knew. (She never turned to it carelessly again.)

She lay awake that night thinking of Cappagh. There had then been a life before the War. The War coming so

soon after, had blotted it out, with her childhood in the nursery at Winds, where Nanny sat these days knitting socks for Godfrey and David. But David was at Sandhurst still and the War would be over before he got out. Or, she hoped it would, and she was curiously cold inside her clothes thinking of David and the possibility of his going out. It had been bad enough with Godfrey. But Godfrey had been out so long, that she had almost got used to it. You could get used to everything, for already she could hardly imagine a world where there wasn't a war. And Godfrey was all right still and as he had been so for so long there was no reason why he shouldn't go on being all right. But she had sat quite still staring down at Philip's name. And when the tea bell rang and she went into the dining-room and sat at table she was silent still, seeing Philip's name. Someone noticed that she did not eat much. But war-time food was filthy (the girls' conversation was more full of slang after each holiday spent with brothers and their friends on leave), and no one was very much surprised. But Stella's special friend watched her across the table, and she was awake when Stella moved in her bed an hour after lights were out.

'Stella.'

'Yes.'

'Did you say something?'

'No.'

'What are you doing?'

'Looking for my handkerchief.'

This was whispered across the room where the other girls slept, breathing steadily.

'You were thinking of something,' Margery's whisper came, charged with sympathy. 'I saw you at tea. What is it . . . the War?'

'Yes.'

'Your brother's all right?'

'Yes.'

Margery knew from her voice that she had been crying—not for Philip only, but for Cappagh and Aunt Nancy. Would she have to write to Aunt Nancy, and—my God, she thought as she had heard David say it—what on earth shall I say to Aunt Nancy?

'Someone else then?' Margery whispered softly. 'Someone you liked.' (There was someone she was sure she liked although she hadn't told anyone except Stella. It didn't seem possible. She was rather frightened of the new strange idea that she might like someone 'that way')

'A cousin' Stella screwed up a wet handkerchief crying for Cappagh and Winds as they had been before the War and would never be again; crying because she did not feel secure about Godfrey any more, and David . . . She was cold between the sheets although the summer night was warm, her nightdress wet against her body, thinking of David. 'I saw it in the paper when I was supposed to be practising.'

'Oh, only a cousin' Margery had lost a cousin too. She had hardly known him, but she had made the most of it, wearing a black tie for a day, since she hadn't got a black frock.

Stella felt differently evidently for she whispered with great urgency, 'You needn't tell anyone.'

'Oh.' Margery had been going to tell everyone. School life was so dull when the War was going on outside. She lifted herself cautiously in bed and the bed creaked as she searched the darkness trying to find Stella. She found her, but only her bed and her form under the clothes and her face on the pillow. Stella had shut her out, was shutting them all out, not wanting them to know. A little hurt and offended, Margery turned on her side and slept again.

Chapter 8

STELLA, lying in the darkness, thought, if she had been a boy she could have given a false age. David had wanted to give one to get there sooner, but as Godfrey had pointed out reasonably it wouldn't be any use since he looked so much younger than he really was. But, Stella thought, in a year or so, with her hair up—she had tried it to-day in the dormitory when there was no one there—she might look eighteen. Sometimes she didn't mind so much. Then something woke it like Philip being killed and Edmund whom she remembered vaguely sitting on the top of the mountain at Cappagh, lonely and aloof in the sunlight; or the end of the term and lucky seniors leaving to go and do war work, and sometimes a girl came on leave wearing uniform and lunched with Miss Braye in the sanctum of her room and was asked to speak to the school afterwards. And she stood in the school hall looking down from the platform at all the faces turned her way, and she was rather nervous and couldn't think of what to say. She had seen things . . . knew things . . . but not here where she felt a frightened schoolgirl again . . . and so cold. Had it always been so cold? Perhaps she whispered something to an older girl who had been her friend, afterwards, walking in the garden or in one of the austere conventional rooms. The school had all the feeling of a convent. When she had gone she left some disturbance behind her. Beds creaked in the dormitories long after lights were out. Why had one been born in 1900 or later, instead of five years earlier? Muriel had gone to France to drive an ambulance. She might with luck get almost up to the line. Stella, lying in the darkness, thought David would get there one day and she would be left behind.

Then she forgot for a little, but only for a little. Every day there were letters on the hall table marked 'Passed

by Censor.' At the beginning of each term there was a noticeable increase in the number because brothers had come on leave during the holidays with their friends, and there had been parties for lonely officers and there had never been so many men in the world It was no wonder that hockey and school parties seemed dull afterwards. But during recreation girls played popular dance tunes and sang songs of the moment together, their eyes dreamy, and smiling to themselves as though they remembered something.

There was a rush to snatch letters in the morning. The headmistress, listening from her room, was aware of it It did not fit in with the atmosphere of the school, but she had never interfered with letters It had been part of the principle of the school She had been a schoolmistress for thirty years She could not now have been anything else. All the mistresses who had stayed were nun-like, fitting in with the conventional atmosphere of the school. The younger ones had all gone off to do war work, and the headmistress could have told beforehand with unfailing certainty which would go and which would stay. She had always known about the girls too, seeing them in class or coming to her room on their good behaviour or frightened (and a little cold) for a talking to about something They hadn't known how well she knew them. She wasn't beautiful, wasn't impressive—not the headmistress of a school story. She was rather fat and comfortable and plain, and she didn't even seem very clever. But she looked at the girls and knew what each one of them was going to do and she was nearly always right. She had known which one would care only for clothes and dances and men when she came out, would marry in her first season someone able to provide her with all these things. When a girl came back to visit her old school, somehow losing her poise and certainty at the door, slipping a little on the polished floor as she crossed the hall, feeling a schoolgirl again, she could not guess that Miss Braye had always known.

She knew now although she showed no sign of it; the pile of letters on the hall table for which there was such a scurry when prayers over set the girls free, could not all be from brothers and fathers at the Front. There were signatures on the envelopes and some came in the conspicuous green envelopes issued to officers on the understanding that only matters of a personal nature were written inside Miss Braye never looked at them.

She pretended not to see or to hear; but she wondered sometimes what kind of schoolgirls she would have to deal with if the War lasted another five years. She wondered about that, taking an amazingly absent-minded class at the beginning of the term If the War lasted another five years, she thought, one would have to give up school altogether. Anyhow, there would be no food. It was becoming more and more difficult to feed people at all. And it will be seen that her mind wandered too When she saw the colour leave the faces of half a dozen girls, she knew that something had happened outside the window. She had been standing with her back to it.

'If you please, Miss Braye,' someone said. 'There's a telegraph boy.'

There was a moment when she was lost, helpless, staring at the strangely colourless faces of the girls, from which the blood had ebbed away slowly and painfully They looked their helpless apprehension at each other, all of them equal, shut into this room by a wall of fear. Then she moved : 'I will see what it is at once,' she said. 'At once,' assuring them that she would not keep them one minute waiting, holding them back with that as though if they thought she should fail, they would break through and swarm out into the hall to snatch the telegram themselves, fight over it and open it. She went out into the hall which was full of sunlight. The telegraph boy was whistling cheerfully at the door

He whistled while she fumbled with the envelope as she

had come to fumble over telegrams, a lifetime it seemed before she opened it. And all the time she was thinking of the class she had left waiting, watching the door. She went back and spoke quietly.

'Not for any of you' (she had not meant to say that). But she had seen only the faces of half a dozen girls among all those turned her way, the half dozen for whom news might come in this manner. It was only about relatives that one heard by telegram. She saw the faint movement of their faces as though life began to stir in a dead thing, the blood coming slowly back. She looked at them, reassuring them. 'Not for any of you.' And they looked back their relief and unashamed indifference, because they were not ready yet to feel sympathy for whoever it *was* for. They only thought: 'He's all right.' And there was no room for anything else. She added for the others. 'Someone's father has been wounded—one of the juniors. Only slightly I am glad to say.' And she went away to break it to Peggy Fisher and to tell her that she was to go home at once, forgetting to leave her class any instructions.

'We'd better go on ourselves, I suppose,' someone said when the door had closed behind her. But they didn't go on although they had meant to. They talked. And six girls turned and looked at each other and there was no need to talk. 'I got a fright,' one of them said, and stooped her head and drew a pattern on her desk, foolishly. She drew it with great care. 'A fright. I wonder who it is.' She broke off, feeling oddly breathless. Her heart was still hammering, making such a noise that she wondered everyone could not hear it. It had seemed to stop quite dead when the telegraph boy had passed the window.

Of such incidents their school life was made up. No one could say that it was dull. But routine became more and more intolerable. One had to break it somehow. Stella Manning broke it by going out to bathe in the open air swimming bath on an autumn night when the moon had

kept her awake. She dragged Margery out too, but Margery funked the icy water, sitting on the edge, shivering, her feet in it, and rather frightened, saying, 'Come in, Stella. . . . I think you've had enough really.' She searched the water for Stella, losing her suddenly in the shadow of the house which lay half over the bath. Supposing Stella should get cramp and drown? She couldn't swim well enough to save her. 'Stella,' she whispered anxiously.

Stella slipped through the icy water, feeling half asleep, in a dream. It had been agonising at first dropping over the side into the bath, not splashing, in case anyone should hear from the house which lay above them dark and quiet. The cold which took her breath away, leaving no room for anything else, numbed some pain in her, like an anaesthetic. She slipped into the moonlight under Margery, mocked at her through chattering teeth. 'You shirker' (that was the word one used nowadays). 'Aren't you coming in?'

'Too cold. Do come out, Stella. Oh, I wish we hadn't done it.'

'It's wonderful.' Stella vanished into darkness again, hid herself and some intolerable pain in waves of darkness.

Lifting herself at last, dripping, on to the edge of the bath and standing shivering, she faced Miss Braye, who had been working late and had heard them. 'Now we're for it,' she thought, coming awake.

Miss Braye said quietly, 'Isn't it very cold?'

Stella blinked the water out of her eyes, trying to see her face in the moonlight. You never knew where you were with Miss Braye. Was she going to take it quite calmly?

'It is rather cold,' she acknowledged.

'You had better go in quickly. Dry in the bathroom and get into bed, both of you.' She followed them along the terrace to the door. They ran, Stella leaving a dripping trail behind her. She hadn't been able to see Miss Braye's face, didn't know a bit where she was, where they were. It was all her fault though.

She said that to Miss Braye when she came to make sure they were in bed, and brought them hot drinks, which were good, and quite worth it, Stella thought; meaning the row that there would certainly be in the morning.

'It was my fault,' she insisted. 'Margery never wanted to come.' That indeed had been true Margery hadn't got anything out of it. Margery, of course, wouldn't have that, and insisted that it was just as much her fault. Miss Braye said, 'We'll talk about that in the morning,' and they drank hot cocoa and forgot that there was a war on. So it *had* been worth it, Stella thought.

But rules must be obeyed, Miss Braye pointed out reasonably, interviewing her in the morning. She knew it was all Stella's plan. 'And if you had got pneumonia you would have caused a lot of trouble and anxiety and wouldn't have helped anyone.'

'I'd have been a useless mouth,' Stella thought miserably. 'I am that, anyhow,' and tried to hide again in waves of darkness. Miss Braye never asked why she had done it. Perhaps she guessed how intolerable monotony and safety were. Stella had not been able to sleep with the moonlight so bright in the room, and she had lain awake, wide awake. Things were bad on the Somme then. They had the same moon out there. She had taken her knitting from under her pillow and tried to knit, but she couldn't see and she didn't knit well enough to be able to do it without seeing. She lost a stitch in Godfrey's sock and the moon went behind a cloud as she searched for it, leaving her in darkness fumbling over a sock for Godfrey. And suddenly she couldn't bear it any longer, feeling for Margery.

'Are you awake?'

'Yes. I wondered if you were.'

'Isn't it awful?'

'Yes.'

'I wish I was one of the kids. They don't seem to mind ... or much older. We're just the wrong age, the worst age.'

'Yes.' They whispered their agony in the darkness.
'I want to do something . . . mad. Go for a ride or swim
or something . . .'

Miss Braye looked at her across the table Stella Manner-
ing was growing, she thought. They were all growing too
quickly. Their bodies were underfed, their minds over-
developed, over-stimulated 'They're using up all their
strength,' she said to someone 'By the time they are
twenty, they'll have none left. Girls of that age used to be
children. Now they're women with children's bodies.'

There was a rush downstairs after prayers to find the
post. Once a girl stood still in the hall, staring blankly at
the empty table when everyone else snatched their letters.

'Nothing for me.'

'Nothing for you.' Someone answered cheerfully. 'Oh,
here, what about this? Funny letter. It's addressed to
Felicity, just Felicity. Returned postal packet.' She read
so much before Felicity snatched it from her She didn't
understand at first

'He's been killed,' she said dully, but no one heard And
she read her own letter, and when she got one the next day,
posted before he had gone over, she thought it had been
a mistake But you often got letters now from people after
they were dead She felt it badly for a time while there
were no letters for her. But the next term there was a big
Australian who had been staying in a neighbouring house
during the holidays and who was lonely, he said. And he
called her Kiddy and sent her enormous boxes of choco-
lates, which lifted her in the estimation of the school. And
the chocolates were jolly good after school food and the lack
of sugar, and they ate them greedily until they felt sick.

Stella got a box of chocolates on her birthday, but only
from David. She and Margery ate a whole layer in the early
morning before breakfast and could not eat any breakfast
afterwards. But that wasn't missing much, since the cook

had left to join the W.A.A.C.s and the new cook was hopeless, battling with war food. The home-made bread which had been good before, had lumps of soda in it now, and Stella had agonising pains after eating it. She made her breakfast off tea and porridge and felt ravenous before lunch-time at first. Afterwards she got used to it like everyone else. They ate less and less and lived on the excitement that came in from outside with the post and letters from the Front. After a time the porridge gave her pains too, so she breakfasted off tea alone.

'I suppose you get lots to eat,' she said to David when she went home for the holidays, and David said yes, they got lots to eat. 'Lucky wretch,' she said and thought, he scored all the time. Seeing David in uniform woke it all up again. School was awful, she said to Cynthia. Must she go back? But Cynthia did not seem to understand. She had been happy there and Mary had been happy there. But there hadn't been a war then, Stella thought desolately.

She didn't say it. She wouldn't have been sure afterwards that Cynthia had heard. She was suddenly frightened, as though she had put out her hand in the dark to feel Cynthia's and found nothing there. It was terrifying—like coming into the house and wanting Cynthia and running up the stairs and down the long corridor to Cynthia's room and opening the door and the blank shock of finding the room empty. Even though one had been prepared for it, telling oneself all the way that one might not find her, that she might be out and would come back soon, which was no use at all. She had had so much to tell Cynthia when she came back for the holidays. She had saved it up, carrying on imaginary conversations as one does when one must live alone even among a great many people, preparing the story that she would tell Cynthia. She knew now that she would never tell it, but she could not have explained why. She looked at her and was awed before her beauty. The sudden discovery that she was beautiful was frightening.

too, taking Cynthia further away. Stella stood lost on the bewildering road of childhood where people were always going.

They came too. More people surely than had ever come before. Mary from her hospital in London, and wounded soldiers on leave, friends of Godfrey's or Mary's or Cynthia's. Stella could hardly sort them out. But they disturbed the dogs who smelt their uniform and their boots and went away disappointed but still not satisfied, and vaguely troubled.

Time which should have been endless in childhood went so fast when people came on leave. Stella used to look at the clock on the dining-room chimneypiece which ticked out the minutes. The clock had always been there since she could remember. It was like something alive, a kind old face looking down at her. It had glimmered palely in the cold light of the early morning when she tiptoed in to see the time before some early ride. She remembered it the first night when she had sat up to dinner, and the cold pale face of the clock had seemed to remove itself beyond the light of the candles and to be disapproving. Now she associated it with Godfrey or David coming on leave. She would look at it as they sat down to their first meal, counting hours into minutes. And a week later when they were having breakfast by candlelight, perhaps before an early morning train, the expression of the clock would be strangely unchanged as though it made no difference to it whether people came or went.

When they had all gone away she was left with Cynthia for a little time. And soon the holidays would be over and she would be going back to school. She hadn't seen much of Cynthia. There seemed to be so many other people always there. But now Cynthia turned back to her from that mysterious world in which Stella could not follow her and said that they might have a ride. There were army horses stabled at Winds and they were always welcome to exercise them. Stella's face grew bright. A ride with Cynthia.

'I haven't ridden for ages,' Cynthia said, and wondered

if she would fall off After tea, she suggested It was the loveliest moment of the day.

They rode out of the yard and through the gate on to the white road, after tea when the country was bathed in yellow September sunlight, Stella blinked her eyes facing it. They rode into it, the white dust under the horses' feet, turned off the road, and scrambled up a lane which was a river in winter Stella sat forward loosely, hearing the sound of the horses' feet slipping and stumbling on the uncovered stones, and liking it. The lane was familiar holding memories of childhood when they had had tea early so that they might ride afterwards, summer riding which was so different from riding in winter. The hedges grew higher as they rode and there was a moment when she fancied that they were wreathed in roses as they were in this lane in June, throwing out long arches and trails to catch them as they went by. The hedges shut her in with Cynthia into sudden security. And then they were at the top and all the world lay before them, blue and yellow in the sunlight. They sat for a moment on their horses, looking over the map the country made, yellow and green fields, gold fields where the corn had not yet been cut, pale where it lay in swaths, and the hills blue and distant in the sunlight A little time ago it had been gold and red-gold with standing crops of wheat and barley. They were like conquerors, the van of an invading army looking over the country which was theirs to take.

They took it, going down hill again between the high hedges. They rode slowly as people ride in summer and Cynthia's horse, feeling a loose rein, stopped and lifted his head to crop a branch. He stood contentedly, the flies about his head, the branch trailing from his mouth as he chewed it Cynthia smiled at Stella over her shoulder, gathered up her reins and moved her knee and they rode on.

They joined the road where motor cars sometimes came, went with it a little way and turned off, climbing again.

Behind them the Downs lay in sunlight, the small sheep-paths running mysteriously into distance. The track they were on now led to a farm and the long white farmhouse had all the sun in its windows. They stopped before they came to it at a white gate which was turned to gold too. Cynthia rode up to it and stooped, opening it with her whip. It swung shut again behind them and the horses' feet fell softly on the grass.

Now Stella was sure. (She had been sure of nothing.) The gate shutting had shut her in with Cynthia and that was all that mattered. For a moment Cynthia sat in the sunlight, letting her horse crop the grass. He was not too energetic after a year or more as an officer's charger on a ration of oats.

'You're lazy, Cynthia, both of you,' Stella said, passing her. Cynthia laughed. She was lazy, she agreed. The field sloped down to a valley. They followed the hedge going down. 'Nothing too desperate,' Cynthia smiled, faintly apologetic. 'I haven't ridden for ages. No larks as Nanny would say.'

Stella smiled back at her. 'I am afraid it depends more on my horse than on me.' She tugged at the hard mouth of her horse who wanted to be off, got him quiet again and they walked down hill. She would have been content to walk for ever like this beside Cynthia.

At the bottom of the hill they let the horses go and raced each other the long length of the field and up again to the top of the hill. A summer wind blew the rough yellow grass like a sea. Stella saw it ahead of her as she galloped, below her, behind her, everywhere.

When she drew rein beside Cynthia, she could hear beyond the horses' heavy breathing, the sound the wind made blowing through it.

She looked at Cynthia who sat, letting her horse graze again. Her face was framed against the Downs, blue in the distance. 'I won,' Stella said, leaning forward to straighten her

horse's rein. She felt half asleep. It had been a dream ride. She had lost Cynthia and looked back and seen Cynthia's red jersey the other side of the field against the yellow corn. And then she had heard Cynthia's horse galloping behind her and they had galloped together, pushing away the world on either side. And at the top lay sunlight and blue hills and that soft wind. Summer riding. No riding in winter was like this.

They rode back towards the gate when the horses had had enough. Stella went slowly, unwillingly. The gate shut her in with Cynthia and she did not know what lay outside. She looked at her suddenly trying to find something.

'It's been lovely, Cynthia, hasn't it?'

'Lovely,' Cynthia said in Cynthia's voice which made it lovelier. She couldn't define what it was in Cynthia's voice that made you stop, holding your breath lest you should lose anything of what Cynthia was going to say.

'We must ride again, Stella.' She looked straight before her saying it, her face framed against blue hills. But it mightn't be the same, Stella thought, when they rode again. Nothing ever was. And the white gate, a little mysterious now that the sun had left it in shadow, seemed to come closer and closer to them of its own accord. Beyond it, the pale cornfields stretched to the distant Downs. A farm cart went across the stubble still in sunlight, dark against it. The cart was laden with corn and going home. They could hear the creaking and jolting of the wheels, the voice of the man who walked beside the horse talking to him. The cart reached the road before they did. They heard the creak as the gate opened, the man's voice again. The big cart-horse turned his head answering.

Stella blinked with the sunlight in her eyes. It was only between the high hedges where the gate was, that the shadows lay. So many fields that had once been meadow were tilled now because of the War, which made country more coloured and different from the country one had

known in childhood. Cynthia was at the gate stooping to it, but the horse moving carried her away.

'Shall I do it?'

'I've got it.' The gate swung open and they rode out. It closed behind them and they were on the white road again, a little cloud of dust under them.

'It was lovely,' Stella said, but no one heard her, and she winced, looking at Cynthia and away again. Cynthia had forgotten her, riding beautifully as Cynthia did everything. She looked so beautiful and so happy and yet with a shadow lying over her happiness. She turned once and smiled at Stella from an immense distance. It had been a delicious ride, she said. And she had loved it and they must ride again. But they had lost the sunlight and there was a faint white mist in the deep lane as they rode with the high hedges over them. The mist seemed to lie between them and Cynthia's face was mysterious, half lost in it. Stella felt it wet against her face and her hands. She had taken off her gloves when she got hot, riding. She could smell the mist rising over the fields beyond the hedges. It reminded her suddenly that autumn had come although the afternoon had seemed like summer. It hadn't been summer riding after all but autumn riding. There was all the difference in the world between them.

Something else came across the fields with the mist, a smell of hay heating. There had been a long wet period and they had been late cutting and saving it. Stella wondered where it was, snuffing it and turning a little as she rode. Not one of their ricks at Winds. It was a frightening, sinister smell.

She looked at Cynthia, but Cynthia had forgotten her, her face under her soft felt hat shadowy, a little heavy. She had gone away again into a world where Stella could not follow her. She rode alone beside Cynthia, smelling the heating hay and hearing the scramble of the horses' hoofs over the bare stones where a river had been. The smell and sound filled a world in which there was nothing else.

Chapter 9

AN ARMY groom took the horses from them in the yard. There were some advantages about the War, and it was exciting to have a horse in every stall of the stables. It gave one an oddly pleasant feeling to hear them moving and to know that not one of the stalls or loose boxes in these days was cold and empty. They went in by the kitchen door, where Cynthia turned aside to speak to Mrs. Bates and Stella went on alone upstairs. There was someone coming to dinner, Francis Seymour, who lived at Heystead over the other side of the county and was home on leave. They had always known him in a way, but they hadn't seen so much of him before as they saw now. It was perhaps because he wanted cheering up after his wound, although he said he was quite well again, but he still limped a little.

Stella liked his dogs whom he brought with him when he came to play not too energetic tennis, driving himself in a small car with three or four of them sitting beside him, usually half on top of each other. There were often fights between them and the dogs at Wins. They fought on the steps where they met, smelling each other suspiciously, and in the drawing-room in the middle of tea, unexpectedly, and in the yard about Francis' car. The terriers fought and Francis' retriever, who adored him, looked on whimpering. When there was a fight Francis would move slowly as he did everything and shout at the dogs, and his voice was so loud that even the dogs would be startled, falling apart and staring at each other in amazement. And Sam the retriever would creep to Francis' knees, assuring him of his innocence. But he wouldn't bring the dogs to-night, Stella thought, taking off her riding-breeches and putting on her dressing-gown and collecting her sponge. She went down the long corridor, dim in the September dusk, to the bath-

room. She would just, she was thinking, be able to get her bath without lighting a candle. She lay in it luxuriously, half asleep, still thinking of the ride and seeing Cynthia's red jersey the other side of the field.

She was ready before Cynthia. She passed her door going downstairs, and knocked and opened it. Cynthia was sitting in front of the glass in a white dressing-gown, her hair about her shoulders. The candles on the dressing-table lit that corner of the room and left the rest in the dusk. Cynthia, seeing her come in the mirror, turned and smiled at her. But the shadow lay over her face as Stella had seen it reflected in the mirror when she stood in the doorway before Cynthia heard her.

'Ready, Stella? Go and entertain Francis. He has come'

Stella went out silently, and downstairs to entertain Francis.

Miss Irving, their old governess who still lived at Winds, would not be down until just before dinner. She took ages about dressing, Stella thought, and coming to the end of the corridor, stared at the long mirror that faced her on the wall. The mirror gave her back her own reflection with the corridor behind her in the September dusk. She started a little. It had seemed to hold more than that, reflecting something she could not define. And she had not recognised her own reflection for a moment, although she had seen herself so often in this mirror. She must still have been seeing Cynthia with that white thing about her shoulders and her hair over it. For she had thought for a moment that it was Cynthia in the glass. And it was only herself in the white frock she wore at school for parties and great occasions. And how plain she looked, she thought, staring at her own reflection. How could she have thought that she had seen Cynthia's face with that shadow over it and the look of mystery as though Cynthia saw something of which she was half afraid? *She* couldn't have looked like that. She blinked and opened her eyes and saw her own face

looking back at her from the mirror, and her own overgrown body in the white frock which was too short, and didn't seem now to fit her anywhere. She smiled at her own reflection and in the dusk with the shadows deepening, Cynthia's face smiled back at her, heavy with mystery and some secret sorrow.

Francis was there already. She knew that at the drawing-room door. Francis was that sort of definite person. You would never go to a room where you expected to find him and not discover until you got to the door that he was not there. And when he came into a room his shoulders seemed to fill the doorway.

He was standing on the hearthrug now, his back to the fire. He looked as if he had been there for quite a long time. He might always have been there and belonged to it. The half-formed thought gave Stella a little shock. And still it was comforting, filling some gap that Godfrey and David had left. He was talking to the dogs, turning one of them over gently, with his foot. It was Jack, Godfrey's old fox terrier who was always looking for Godfrey, having a wild hope and dashing up to his room, and coming back again to lie with his head on his paws, his eyes wide open and desolate.

Stella wondered, seeing Jack lying contented for once while Francis stooped and scratched him, if Jack smelt something which comforted him, from Francis. But it couldn't be that, because Francis was wearing ordinary evening clothes, not uniform which smelt so strongly that it disturbed human beings as well as dogs. How big and strong Francis looked with the firelight behind him. There was no other light in the room yet. A new careless young parlourmaid, distracted by the War and what was happening to her young man at the Front, had forgotten to bring the lamps. So the September dusk came in grey through the long windows and the firelight met it and turned it rosy. And the room was full of the smell of a September garden.

from the bowls and jars of flowers which Cynthia had arranged Phlox, clear white and pink, and blue monkshood and golden rod and white Japanese anemones and tall blue thistles. Cynthia had a gift for mixing flowers One great jar of them stood on a table against the window with the grey dusk making a background for it.

Stella stood for a moment in the doorway in her white dress. How strongly those autumn flowers smelt. It was the fire, of course—a wood fire and the smell of burning wood was mixed with the other smell She caught her breath a little, troubled by some association. She put out her hand to find something and lost it. But the trouble was there And she stood in the doorway looking at Francis and was lost in it.

Then Francis straightened himself and turned her way. His voice was a little husky when he spoke, as it had been since he went to France, where he had been half drowned and frozen before he was wounded.

'I thought you were never coming,' he said very slowly. Stella came out into the room and faced him in her white frock, and he laughed rather oddly. 'Stella growing up,' he said. 'Do you know, when you stood in the doorway I took you for Cynthia? But I didn't see your skirts of course.' And then Cynthia came in and Stella saw him look at her.

She went upstairs to bed after dinner, carrying a candle because they were economising over lights and there was no lamp upstairs. So she took the faint yellow candlelight with her and it went just a little way into the September darkness that filled the house now and the darkness held the rest. She had left Francis and Cynthia sitting by the fire downstairs not talking much, and Miss Irving half asleep over her knitting in the corner. But presently when she woke up, Stella knew she would slip away saying she had letters to write, and leave Cynthia and Francis together. And Cynthia going upstairs later would stand at the door of Miss Irving's room and say, 'How many letters have you

written, Irvie?" and Miss Irving would come awake with difficulty "Dear me, I must have fallen asleep."

So Stella went up alone, slowly carrying the candle in her hand. For a moment, facing the mirror at the top of the stairs, she held it above her head and saw Cynthia's face with the shadow lying heavy over it.

There was nothing to break through the shadow, to light the darkness as Cynthia's eyes lit it when she stood at Stella's door coming to say good-night "Are you awake, darling?"

There was no reason why Stella should have felt that Cynthia would never come again, in that way. She put her candlestick down in her room and undressed without troubling to light the other candles There was a September moon rising yellow over the Downs She went to the window in her nightdress and looked out. It was turning silver now, the far-away line of the Downs black against it. As it climbed higher, the whole world turned to silver, black shadowed where there were woods and trees The corn-fields with their stacked sheaves of corn lay bathed in it, the sheaves turned to silver. The moonlight drifted across the fields over the old garden which lay beneath the window, where only the ghostly paths remained The garden had been moved long ago in Stella's childhood to a little distance from the house, where the soil was better and there was more continuous sun; and the old garden was supposed to go back to grass. But the spirit of the garden was still there and the paths remained like small ghosts. Stella could see them from her window, shadowy in the moonlight The bulbs had spread and gone wild and came up and flowered in the spring, and there were bushes of moss roses tangled and overgrown which had been left behind when the others were moved to the new garden Aunt Nancy had always said she loved the old garden at Winds, because it was like a bit of Ireland in the middle of English neatness They all knew that it only had to be dug up properly and returfed.

for the ghostly paths to disappear and smooth lawn to cover what had once been a garden. But the order was never given, as though someone loved the old garden too much to bury it.

An apple tree outside Stella's window had been left behind like the roses and it threw a criss-cross pattern on the ground below. Beyond it the ghostly paths of the lost garden met and intersected each other. The wall of the house threw a long shadow to a little distance, hiding some mystery

Stella looked up. The apple tree was always pink with blossom in spring. She loved having this room because it gave her the apple tree outside. The fruit was already formed and it hung against the sky outside, small silver balls as the moon caught them. All her life afterwards she was to associate that silver world of a September night and the small silver apples hung from the black branches, with a feeling of desolation. It was the first real break up, the first loss of a childhood that had been perfect

The shadow of the house moved mysteriously. She heard a voice. Francis' voice. He came out of the shadow and stood on the lawn looking up at the house. He would remember this night, he said in a low rather husky voice. That husky voice made Stella think suddenly of the War which she had almost forgotten. Then Cynthia's pale frock glimmered and Cynthia's voice was so soft that she could not hear it. But she heard their footsteps on the stone-flagged paths that ran round the house, and then they were walking on the lawn, and their footsteps were lost. Stella discovered suddenly that she was cold and got into bed, and the moon climbing steadily, high above the Downs now, found her window and came in and fell on the floor and across the end of her bed. But she hid her face in the pillow beyond it, safe from it, in the darkness.

She came awake in the hour before the dawn as one came suddenly awake in those years, wondering why one had

wakened, and if something had happened out there. And, lying awake, wondered what was happening out there now. The moon was in the room which seemed full of the smell which had troubled her downstairs. She discovered the cause of it. There was a jar of phlox on the low window-sill, silver-edged in the moonlight. A faint wind disturbed the branches of the tree outside and shook the little apples that were like small silver balls Stella, on a sudden impulse, got up, only half awake, and tip-toed over the cold floor in her bare feet and went down the long corridor which was half in moonlight, half in shadow, to Cynthia's door.

It was a vague, half-formed thought. She would find Cynthia there, the sister who was hers, not that frighteningly beautiful stranger. Opening the door softly she saw that the room was full of moonlight which fell over the bed and over Cynthia's face as she slept. The windows were open, and the soft wind that stirred the branches of the little apple tree moved the curtain as Stella's coming made a draught. The rustle of the stiff chintz was like something alive. But the sound was oddly cold as the chintz would be against one's hand if one touched it. It was old chintz, thin and faded and easily torn. All the memories of that time were full of the cold feeling of the September night. And only to-day they had gone riding through yellow grass and dreamed that it was summer and talked of summer riding. Feeling frozen she looked at Cynthia as she lay asleep, her face framed in her hair. It was intolerable. Cynthia had gone away where she could not follow her. It was Francis with his big shoulders which seemed to fill any doorway as he stood in it, and his way of watching Cynthia across the table at dinner, or across the drawing-room in the firelight, who had taken Cynthia from Stella. Overwhelmed with her loss she crept back to bed and clung to the thought of David, who was altogether hers.

After that she understood, watching Cynthia and Francis who both grew silent, more silent every day as though the

weight of their love was almost too heavy to carry. Francis hardly ever spoke, but only watched Cynthia all the time. And some time that autumn they were married in the village church early one morning because there was so little time, and Francis went back to France soon after, leaving all the dogs with Cynthia, so that Winds was more than ever like a kennel, and the dogs settled down to live together peaceably, having common interests now. But Francis' dogs waited and listened always for him to come back, which he couldn't do yet because he had been taken prisoner. And they went away from the other dogs every now and then and lay together listening and waiting, thinking of Francis and wondering why he didn't come. And Godfrey's old fox terrier, who had never made friends with any of them, dreamed alone of Godfrey, waiting and listening for him.

Stella had been allowed home for a day or two for Cynthia's wedding, and after it she went back to school where half a dozen girls now wore black and were set apart from the others with a forlorn distinction. It was embarrassing the first day after a girl returned (they went away always for a few days when it happened), her face rather white and her new black clothes not seeming to fit her or belong to her. Should one or should one not go and say that one was sorry? The question distracted a whole class through the first lesson of the day. It was becoming more and more difficult to keep attention to work, as the despairing mistresses realised. And the talk in the darkness went on long past midnight. They had so much to tell each other after the most hectic holidays. *He* had gone out again but he had promised to write . . . and she had had a postcard already, one of the ones that the men called Whizzbangs because they were short and sweet. They giggled in the darkness over the joke, feeling as though they were at the Front, part of it, not shut outside. They all had that terror of being shut outside. Only 'I am quite well,' with the rest crossed out. How far away the Christmas holidays

seemed! Someone might get leave at Christmas with luck. Brigid, whom Stella hadn't known very well, meeting her in the corridor, turned a white face to her above her black clothes, 'If you could stop them,' she said. She could speak to Stella because Stella might be in the same position any day, any hour. 'I know how they feel and it's awfully nice of them, but if they needn't say it.' She stared at Stella in terror. 'If they come up one after another to say it . . . you know.' And she looked from side to side like a hunted creature. She wanted to get away, somewhere where no one knew her, where no one knew what had happened, where she needn't wear black. Her only brother had been killed, and they had always done everything together. She couldn't realise it yet.

Stella stopped them. They handed Brigid bread and butter politely at tea. Someone even pressed on her a share of her sugar ration. A girl came from another dormitory that night to offer her chocolates (a Canadian officer this time. They were so well paid, that they had plenty of money for chocolates). Brigid took a chocolate with agonised politeness and ate it with great difficulty. The Captain of the hockey eleven asked her where she would like to play. But no one referred directly to Brigid's brother who had been killed. Vaguely they felt the hopelessness of trying to realise what that meant, just how much it meant to Brigid. One couldn't tell unless one knew Brigid very well, and Brigid did not tell anyone what it meant. She did not know. But she supposed, lying awake when all the others were asleep, that she would get used to it in time.

Chapter 10

WHEN Godfrey came on leave, Stella went home. But Godfrey, she felt, did not really belong to them now. He belonged to Mary and to Michael who lived altogether at Winds in these days, in the new nursery, comforting Nanny for her children who had grown up and gone away. When Godfrey had gone out again Stella went back to school and helped another girl to pack a suitcase to go home for a few days because her brother was going to the Front. Someone had told her, 'Nora's packing,' and had looked at her half doubtfully, wondering if she should go to help. Stella went, as one who had a right, knocking at Nora's door. She had done it herself. She knew all about it. And she packed all Nora's things for her in a brisk and business-like manner while Nora sat helplessly watching her, and Stella felt like a nurse.

'Will you want this . . . this?' She could be brusque, easy with Nora, because they were in the same boat. The girl who had spoken to her in the corridor had been outside and one had come to look at people outside from an immense distance and still hating them. The winter dusk came while they packed. (It was winter out there now, Stella thought — cold, there might be snow soon.)

'That everything?' she asked. It was very cold in the unheated bedroom. Nora looked frozen. 'We'd better go down to tea. I'll help you lock up afterwards. Miss Hill is going to London with you, isn't she? And your mother's meeting you? You'll get home to-night.' She was trying to warm Nora with that thought. She'd get home to-night to fires and warmth, and food was always better at home and anything was easier to bear if one was warm. And she never once spoke to Nora about the reason of her going, until they were in the long corridor and she touched her arm suddenly

(it felt cold through the sleeve of Nora

'A week's a long time,' she said 'A long time' She blinked suddenly and stared into the dusky corridor, thinking of David.

When tea was over and Nora's case was locked and strapped and waiting in the hall, and Nora had gone to Miss Braye's room, Stella went back to school and it was time to practise. Practising with cold fingers was torture. And she missed Fraulein too. Fraulein had made music interesting. Stella playing arpeggios mechanically and without interest, her stiff frozen fingers seeming resentful of the task demanded of them, wondered what was happening to Fraulein now. She had never believed that she was a spy. She gave up the arpeggios, breaking the rule of practising which prescribed bread and butter before cake, and played a piece which she had begun with Fraulein ages ago.

'Ach,' Fraulein had said, swaying a little on the high uncomfortable chair beside the piano, her eyes dreamy. 'It is autumn in the woods now. . . So . . . softly . . . louder again . . . softly . . . slowly Presently the snow will come and Christmas, and they will light the Christmas candles in all the cottages.'

The piece played without Fraulein lacked something. Stella would never be a musician and she knew it. The woods in autumn of which Fraulein had made a picture for her while she played would not come. The notes were hard, mechanical as Miss Hill who had taken Fraulein's place counted them. One, two, three, four. She gave it up and played instead 'The British Grenadiers,' which was the march past at Sandhurst. She had learnt it to please David. She came to the end triumphantly as the door opened, and laughed across the piano at the girl who stood in the doorway

'I wondered who it was,' the girl said. 'It sounded better than scales. But if Miss Hill hears you'll catch it.' Her eyes grew large, thinking how Stella would catch it.

Stella yawned. 'I am so cold' She banged the piano with sudden rage. 'Oh damn. How much longer have I got, Ida?'

'It's a quarter to.' Ida looked over her shoulder furtively. 'Someone's coming, play an arpeggio quick. No, it's all right. I say, they might have let us off music when Fraulein went away. Miss Hill's worse.'

'Fraulein was all right,' Stella said, doing a five-finger exercise in despair. 'She got something out of it. Even though she screamed at me. And she always discovered that I had been biting my fingers. But she used to talk about her home, the woods and the orchards and the town she lived in surrounded by forest. "So old, so quiet, ach . . ." ' She imitated Fraulein unconsciously. 'I wonder what's happening to her now.'

A softly closed door was her only answer. Someone coming had forced Ida to flee without a farewell. Stella, left alone, played arpeggios because there was evidently someone near who had sent Ida flying in that way. But only her fingers played, pushing down the notes for that someone to hear, for the sake of peace. One had acquired the science of doing two things at once, practising with one's fingers while one's mind wandered miles away. In this room so much associated with Fräulein she wondered what was happening to her in the German town to which she had gone back—so old, so quiet. She didn't believe—she thought she heard someone and played more vigorously—that Fräulein was a spy as they said. Poor Fräulein. She had embarrassed the school with her ugly clothes and appearance, her flat feet and sentimentality. She was rather awful, of course, but she must once have been a pretty girl or that young man whose picture she wore in a locket round her neck with a piece of his hair wouldn't have been in love with her. But perhaps—Stella left the arpeggios again and played a waltz from memory—Fräulein had invented it. The sort of thing Fräulein would do, and come to believe

in it herself in the end. You couldn't believe Fraulein had ever been young and pretty like the girl in the photograph which she had shown to Stella.

The piece had been dead without Fraulein, a mechanical tune conjuring up no picture of woods in autumn, German woods round an old German town. Stella giving it up, thumped the arpeggios vigorously, played a wrong note, said Damn very loud and did not care if there was anyone there to hear. But the waltz was different. She forgot that her fingers were cold, swaying a little as she sat on the music stool, her eyes dreamy. The waltz filled the room. She shut her eyes playing it from memory, and saw the drawing-room at Winds in firelight and the young officer Godfrey had brought on leave last Christmas who used to play this waltz, sitting at the piano What was his name? . . . Arthur . . . they had called each other by their Christian names . . . and she had almost forgotten the other. Arthur Graham—that was it, she played with her eyes tight shut. Godfrey had brought him because his people were in India and he had nowhere to go. An awful impossible thought, nowhere to spend his leave. Godfrey's wire had sent them all hurrying to the spare room, Nanny coming with sheets carefully aired, a housemaid lighting a fire; Stella had found a few late chrysanthemums and arranged them carefully for the dressing-table. So feverishly had they all shut out that impossible thought that he had leave and nowhere to spend it.

His face wasn't very clear. She played the waltz through and began again at the beginning. She saw it presently, so like everyone else's face at that time that it was hardly worth searching and searching for. He was like everyone else too, laughed like everyone else, talked like them, said, standing in the doorway with the cold December afternoon behind him, 'By Jove, this is jolly good of you, to ask me like this, I mean.'

People were always saying that now. In that forgotten

time quite blotted out before the War, people hadn't said it perhaps, or at least, not in that way, standing in the doorway with the cold winter afternoon behind them and seeming to stamp their feet as though they stamped the mud of the trenches off them, and rubbing their hands a little and laughing and saying, 'It is jolly good of you, you know,' coming into the warmth and light and leaving the coldness outside where they might have been left if someone had not been jolly good. It was no wonder that they said it over and over again.

Lots more had come like him, from the camp near by where life in wooden huts wasn't too comfortable in winter, and they had said, too, when asked to stay to dinner and offered a bath, that that was jolly good and they were awfully grateful. They had played the piano and sung songs; 'There's a Long Long Trail Awinding' and 'In the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia,' which must have been sung in other houses during Christmas holidays in just the same way, because nearly every girl brought it back to school with her, and they all sang it together with the same look of remembering something.

Arthur Graham had played the 'Destiny Waltz' which was, he acknowledged, the only tune he could play. And he hadn't played it very well, out of time and occasionally a wrong note, but they had danced to it. One or two of Cynthia's friends and Mary's had come for Christmas and Stella was allowed to stay up for dinner now, because the War had hastened emancipation of that kind. Cynthia had stopped dancing with a man to whom she talked all the time of Francis (he was Francis' friend and had come to stay), to say, 'You must be tired. Can't I play now?' But Arthur Graham had assured her, his face beaming over this accomplishment of his, that he loved playing, and he had gone on playing the tune through to the end and beginning again Stella had danced too with Maurice Liddell, who was in Francis' regiment and had been wounded when Francis was

captured so that he didn't dance much, but sat down after a little while with Stella on the sofa which had been pushed into one of the windows. Stella had tugged at her white frock which she would grow out of, to pull it over her knees. It wouldn't cover them now. She sat on the sofa uncomfortably, her heart beating because she was sitting beside Captain Liddell. She thought he was like that picture she had seen—Sir Galahad. She must get a copy of it and take it back to school. It would be better than nothing. She wished her skirts were longer, and that she was older, and she looked enviously at Cynthia, adoring her. Captain Liddell looked at her too.

'She's better now,' he said in a low voice to Stella. 'Looking better I mean. The last time I saw her . . .' he broke off. 'Poor old Francis,' he said.

He said it with such intentness and feeling, that Stella was startled. He hadn't said it to her but to himself, watching Cynthia, and there was such a wealth of pity and feeling and an almost overwhelming sympathy in him, that, sitting forward, watching Cynthia, he seemed to stoop under it.

Stella tugged at her inadequate skirts. She was growing out of her white school frock everywhere, in the most unexpected places. It was very uncomfortable, but she supposed it was only because she was growing and it was the awkward age as Cynthia said. Some day, not very far away—she sat beside Captain Liddell, and both of them looked at Cynthia—she would be grown up and her clothes would fit her, being a part of her. Meanwhile she had danced with Captain Liddell, pressed against the hardness of his uniform, smelling it and the leather of his belt, her eyes level with the row of ribbons on his breast—she could count them as she danced—and now she was sitting with him looking at Cynthia, and talking about Francis who had had bad luck he said, and was having a bad time. She was startled, frightened, turning to him with a question. There

was something they had not heard? But Cynthia, she remembered, had had a letter only yesterday.

Oh, no. Only being in prison, a prisoner. It was the same thing, but he repeated it, emphasising Francis' state, poor old Francis.

Perhaps Fräulein—Stella played the 'Destiny Waltz' to the end and began again—had done this too after all, a long time ago, a long time ago—the words made time with the music. But she had done it, danced with German officers in firelit rooms, drifting out through the door afterwards, as Mary's friend Marjorie West drifted with that tall fair gunner officer 'We expect to get orders any day,' he said, as they went through the door, and Marjorie who had been laughing and gay said, 'Oh . . . any day' in such a strange, quiet way, standing quite still in the doorway.

'Yes, any day,' he had said, looking at her, and she had repeated, 'Oh, I see, any day,' as if she had only just understood 'But you haven't heard . . .'

'Only just that. We expect it, of course,' they moved through the door into the library. 'Any day'

It made a tune in Stella's head to the time of the 'Destiny Waltz' Any day, any way, any way, any day. Arthur Graham at the piano played endlessly, tirelessly, his face beaming over this one accomplishment of his which had been so useful in rest huts and Y.M.C.A.s and the like in France and at home. And Captain Liddell, sitting stiffly on the sofa as though his back ached, talked about Francis. It had been a bad show, he said, a woeful business, and his eyes looked suddenly as if he had a headache. He had thought that Francis had been hit

Francis hadn't been hit, Stella said, watching Cynthia dance with a ridiculous fat little man who laughed all the time. Francis hadn't been hit, but he had been reported missing And that, she said leaning her face on her hands and watching Cynthia, had been rather awful. And then the news came that he was a prisoner.

'A prisoner,' Captain Liddell repeated. 'Poor old Francis.'

He moved quickly and Stella sat up and looked at him instead of watching Cynthia. She asked politely and rather shyly if his wound was hurting him. He said not now, but it had a minute ago. She sat with her hands on her knees and dug her nails into them in her feeling, and had it hurt much? she asked.

He said it had then, smiling rather crookedly. But it was over now and he was here and poor old Francis a prisoner. And he didn't say what had happened to a lot of others who were not here and were not prisoners. But he looked again as if he had a headache. Stella thought it would be more comfortable in the library where there were deep chairs and he could lie back in one of them instead of sitting stiffly as if something were hurting him. And the music must bother him too if his head ached. But before she could say anything, the music stopped and Cynthia stood beside fat little Captain Griffiths looking their way and he got up and went to Cynthia, and presently they went out together through the doorway, leaving poor Captain Griffiths alone so that Stella was sorry for him. After all he had gone to the War too, and was going again any day when orders came. But Cynthia, she knew, was only thinking and talking of Francis to Maurice Liddell who had seen him last. And she was sorry for Maurice Liddell too, sorry for herself, for all of them, because no one mattered at all to Cynthia except Francis.

She took Francis' dogs for walks with a forlorn hope of pleasing Cynthia and they were disobedient, hunting and going down rabbit holes and ignoring her while she shouted herself hoarse, only Sam coming back obediently and quivering at her heels, his face lifted. The terriers took no notice of her at all, and she longed for Francis with his great voice to call them back to obedience. She went home with only two dogs and faced Cynthia humbly. There should have been four. But Cynthia, looking up from a letter she

was writing, thought they would find their own way home, and they were disobedient she knew and perhaps it would be better if Stella didn't take them. Stella with empty hands, searching for something to fill them, took Captain Liddell for walks instead. They walked endlessly across the frozen fields, mostly in silence, though sometimes he stopped quite still and looked about him as if he was going to remember what he saw now. He had a curious way of walking, half running which must be because of his wound she thought, and he walked with his head back, sometimes quite silent as if he had forgotten her. They took the Winds dogs who were obedient and came at a call or whistle. And coming home up the avenue they saw the lit windows of the house ahead of them, and Stella looked at Captain Liddell's profile which showed dimly in the dusk and thought he looked a little better now than when he came. And she could have wept over him.

She went back to school feeling different Margery discovered it at once. When Margery smiled, blinking her eyes in that new way she had learned from a beautiful cousin during the holidays (it had taken a good deal of practising and she had put eyelash cream on her lashes to make them grow) and said, she knew someone, so tall, so good-looking who had been wounded three times and had the D.S.O., she felt something in Stella. She opened her eyes wide and looked at her. Stella then . . . too . . . and did she think? And she must tell her. Stella wasn't sure she wanted to tell her. She wasn't sure of anything. It was a new strange idea to her too, bewildering, frightening, and she hadn't got used to it yet. But he had said, walking across the frozen fields where the grass crackled under their feet that they'd be sending him back soon. And she had felt suddenly desolate, a weight on her heart she could not lift. It was as uncomfortable, as disturbing as growing out of one's clothes. But, pressed by Margery—she too knew someone so tall—not good looking—she despised that, but she liked those lean,

serious men. And he had the D.S.O. And he had been wounded once, if not three times. She was less bloodthirsty in her demands than Margery.

"You haven't got his photograph?" Margery asked suspiciously.

No, she hadn't his photograph. (Only Sir Galahad) Did he write to her? He had said he would write Margery searched her face, and surreptitiously, the hall table in the morning. When, quite unexpectedly, a box of chocolates arrived for Stella—he had taken Cynthia out to lunch in London and had said, talking of Winds, 'What about your little sister? Commons pretty short at school, I expect. We get more than we want'—Margery was at once reassured and disappointed. She sat curled on Stella's bed eating the chocolates. They helped one to forget how cold it was with fires that would never burn properly because the coal left for civilian use was getting worse and worse. She put Stella's eiderdown round her and huddled down into it. Her small sharp face glimmered palely in the dusk, all of her that was visible.

Was he young, old? She knew a Major of thirty-five. She had always liked them that age. Her lashes lay on her cheek for a moment, her face was shadowy. And did Stella think really . . .

It was disappointing to acknowledge that he was not yet thirty, although he looked older—much older, she insisted as though blotting out the disgrace of his youth beside Margery's Major of thirty-five. She was ready in her anxiety to assure Margery that he looked at least thirty-five and she might have done that with truth since a night on the Somme when he was hit and Francis taken prisoner. Twenty-five even in those days when one's standards of age had got confused, was no age at all, not so much older than David. But did Stella think really? Stella hid in the dusk now from Margery's sharp eyes. She whispered that she did not know, that she sometimes thought . . . she pressed her hands to-

gether helplessly in the darkness. And suddenly defended herself, carrying the war into the enemy's country. Did Margery think, was she sure of her Major of thirty-five? Margery's certainty made a wall behind which she could hide. Margery after all, eating another chocolate, was more interested in herself than in Stella. He was back at the Front now and it was awful at times she whispered, her pale little face growing sharper in the dusk. But Majors were a bit safer of course; she comforted herself like many another pushing all the world outside into danger so long as *he* was all right. The higher up you got the safer you were, her father said, and he was a Colonel at the War Office and ought to know. Stella moved back into the darkness, away from Margery and her security, hating her.

She had a spurt of growing at this time leaving Margery behind. Margery blinked at her own reflection in the glass and described herself as *petite*. Some people, she said, liked *petite* women and she would *hate* to be very tall. Stella didn't argue for or against it. She often felt tired, perhaps because she was growing too fast. Her body was awkward and uncomfortable, something she must carry about with her whether she would or not. When she was in bed at night she could forget it. (One was warm in bed too.) But her feet touched the bottom rail so that she had to screw them up. She was growing out of the short school bed too. Then her mind, detached from her body, went to France where Godfrey was and where Maurice Liddell was and where David would follow them. (But David, thank God, was still at Sandhurst and she could forget him for a while which was actually a relief.) She had said to Maurice on one of their walks, 'Will you write to me?' No one wrote to her from France except Godfrey. 'And shall we send you things . . . cakes?' She seemed to hold her hands full of cakes running to heal and comfort him with them. And she might knit him things (this thought made her rather shy, although they were all of them knitting the strangest garments at

school for men they did not know. She could not think why she should feel suddenly shy).

He had said that he would write to her, but he did not think he wanted any cakes and he looked down at her rather as he looked at the dogs. But it would be nice if she would write to him. It was at once a relief and a disappointment that he didn't want the cakes. Materials were so difficult to get and Mrs. Bates had her hands full.

When he sent her a box of chocolates, Margery said very loudly, looking at the parcel so that all the girls in the hall could hear,

'Wish I had a brother to send me chocolates,' and everyone knew that it was not Stella's brother who had sent them which was what Margery had intended. Later he wrote . . . not very often. Cynthia, who was in London, had gone to see him off at Victoria. She looked better and Francis was all right. He'd be safe for the duration. He might knock up against Godfrey out there. By this time it was spring, and later he wrote that they had taken over a trench where someone had made a garden. 'We're grateful to them,' he wrote. 'I send you some trench flowers.' Two primroses fell out of the letter, pressed dry.

Stella put the letter under her pillow. She heard it crackle when she moved. She awoke to read it secretly in the early morning, making sure that no one else was awake. She held it against her face to smell its puzzling smell. It was associated with the dogs and the horses at Winds, frosty winter mornings going shooting (although she had never liked the actual killing of birds), a whole life. Holding it against her face she tried to define the smell. It was tobacco she supposed, and leather and uniform. It was the smell of David who had only lately learned to smoke, and of Godfrey and Francis. It filled all her thin, overgrown body with a curious pain . . . the smell of the War in this cold piece of paper against her face.

Chapter 11

AS THE school food got worse and worse, they supplemented it from a store kept in their room—Stella and Margery were promoted to share a room the next term—parcels from home or things bought surreptitiously at the village shop when they went out for walks They sat up secretly in the morning making their breakfast off apples and chocolate cake and went down to the dining-room to turn in more than usual disgust from margarine and bad bread. Then a plague of mice came, terrifying them, scampering over their room at night and their beds and the tables beside them. They fought them in the dark, hunting them. No lights were allowed to be shown because the school was near the sea and also there might be air raids But sometimes their terror of the mice was greater than their fear of the police and they flashed a torch or struck a match. Once a mouse ran over Stella's face as she slept, and she awoke screaming. She was sure it was a rat. She was ashamed in the daylight. One was always being ashamed now, thinking of them out there—David had told her about the rats, someone else had told him—but at night she was terrified again.

'Not terrified exactly.' She and Margery tried to define it, lying awake listening for the patter and scratching to begin again. They thought and told each other of all the things they were not afraid of. You couldn't be afraid of a mouse of course. But they were such nasty things. Stella searching under her pillow for a letter, steadied herself with the feeling of a cold piece of paper against her hand.

It was autumn when a message came one day for her, and the whole class turned to stare at her as she went out of the room. She went down the long cold corridor holding the collar of her flannel shirt with one hand as though she shut out the cold. She remembered it afterwards, how the corridor

stretched before her, how difficult it seemed for her feet to overtake the miles of polished floor, to leave it behind them. When she faced Miss Braye she had always known. It had happened to someone else such a long time ago. And one had felt everything one could possibly feel then and now it was over. But she thought with a curious concentration, the words forming over and over again in her mind, 'I want Cynthia.' And she went on thinking it over and over again, and staring at Miss Braye, who was saying what she had already said so many times in this room and wondering how often she would have to say it yet.

'You will go home at once, Stella,' were the first words Stella heard clearly. Home . . . to Cynthia. 'Your sister will meet you in London, she says. Shall we pack your things? You would rather stay here quietly until then?'

She went to Stella and put her hand on her shoulders. They were thin under the flannel of her shirt Yes, Stella thought, she would like to stay here Not face the curious eyes of the school And she saw herself coming back later in black clothes which did not fit her very well. She looked on curiously at that girl as though at someone else Miss Braye was talking about God, but she hardly heard. God would comfort her No, Stella thought Only one got used to everything. And she supposed a little wearily God knew about the War And she sat in Miss Braye's room and read a newspaper while she waited to go and Miss Braye watching her did not know what to make of her. 'Is it shock?' she wondered. 'Or doesn't she feel it very much?' Trying to comfort Stella, her eyes were wet, and Stella had discovered that fact with amazement. It was only people of Miss Braye's age and over who cried now about the War.

It was a relief to leave school behind, to drive down the hill (in a hired pony trap because petrol was rationed) and look back at the grey house against its woods, which seemed even then to have an unreal air, as though the spirit of the house knew that it would never again be what if had once

been London with its bustle and noise, and men marching and troops at every station was better. Cynthia met her at Victoria, and when Stella's luggage was put in the cloak-room they went out into the Park because there were things they must say before they could have lunch, and Stella was rather embarrassed walking beside Cynthia. Great grief in one's own family was always embarrassing. (But she was glad she had got away from the school, she thought.) Cynthia was wearing black and her face was pale under her hat. Stella wondered if she ought to be wearing black too, and that question troubled her a good deal. Cynthia answered her thoughts as though she had guessed them. 'Godfrey wouldn't want it. . . . I only happened to have black clothes. I shouldn't have bought them. It keeps people from asking stupid questions, that's all.' And Stella couldn't say, although she tried to, that she would like to wear black. They found a seat and sat down. Cynthia sat with the autumn sunlight on her face watching the ducks on the Serpentine. Stella adored her silently, but she couldn't say anything. She couldn't even put out her hand and take one of Cynthia's, which lay in her lap and which were rough and discoloured from being put into chemicals.

She sat and watched the ducks too, and ached with love for Cynthia. She had always loved her terribly and then Francis had come and pushed her out, and Francis had been taken prisoner and Cynthia had gone to London to nurse in a hospital and had got very thin and white with her hands that had once been so pretty all discoloured with the chemicals she had to use.

Stella had had a wild hope hardly formed perhaps (she was desperately ashamed and horrified at herself at once feeling a murderer in spirit as though she had tried to murder Francis) that Cynthia would come back to her now. But Cynthia, sitting with the sunlight on her face, which seemed whiter under her black hat, talked of Godfrey and, Stella knew somehow, was altogether absorbed in Francis.

She was shut outside. She asked Cynthia when she had last heard from Francis and how he was, and Cynthia said, blinking in the sunlight, that he wrote quite cheerfully, and he was in a good prison camp as prison camps went. There were woods outside—miles of them, he wrote—and the trees were all planted close together in the German way so that they grew straight up and there was no undergrowth, and you could see between the trunks of the trees for a long way. And the other side there was farming country with white houses and there had been masses of scarlet geraniums against the houses a little while ago. It was rather like English farming country, and Francis liked farming country. Cynthia stared across the Serpentine at the trees of Kensington Gardens and Stella knew that she had gone away from her into that German country where Francis was, that even Godfrey couldn't bring her back.

But Cynthia talked of Godfrey whom she had once loved, although Stella did not know that, as Stella loved David. Mary was splendid, she said. (Mary had pushed her out long ago.) And it seemed already, didn't it, as if they had always known? She thought Godfrey had known, for there had been something in his last letter. And he had written to her about things he wanted done. (Last talk, last instructions for the one who stayed behind.) He had spared Mary that last talk, turning back to Cynthia who loved him with the heart-breaking love of a sister for a brother. Francis couldn't have pushed Godfrey out with her as Mary had pushed her out. They knew no details yet—only the bare news. But there was a long list of Missing—Cynthia spoke steadily, seeing Francis' name which had been in such a list—and that would have been more terrible, not knowing what was happening to Godfrey.

They had lunch in a restaurant so crowded that it was hard to get a seat. At a table beside them, four very young officers were having lunch together. It was obvious, even if phrases of their conversation had not drifted across, that

they were going back to France. They had looked at Cynthia as she came in, taller and more beautiful than ever, Stella thought in her black clothes, but Cynthia wasn't aware of them. Reading the menu and trying kindly to find a lunch that Stella would enjoy after the restricted school fare, she was still lost in that German country which held Francis. Stella aching over her own loss thought even Godfrey didn't really count in comparison.

Cynthia sitting down had looked round the crowded room. 'I came here once with Francis,' she said 'Before he went out.'

Across the table and the width of the floor between them, Stella met the eyes of one of the young officers. They looked at each other with the frank friendliness of war-time. He was going back possibly to be killed, but he did not feel that clearly. Only that life was good and particularly good here in this restaurant eating off a white cloth with polished glasses and clean plates and flowers and pretty waitresses. And pretty women His eyes went past Stella at whom he had smiled, to Cynthia. Stella ached, adoring Cynthia again He saw it too. She could have told him it was no use, that there wasn't anyone else in the world except Francis, that none of them really mattered because Cynthia was only thinking of Francis

Cynthia talked of Godfrey, her face pale under her black hat. Mary had been splendid Stella would find her splendid when she got to Winds and David would be coming on leave soon. There was no sign yet of his going out. 'You and David must have a good time together,' Cynthia said, as though she was terribly sorry for Stella and couldn't do anything about it. Stella feeling that, could have wept in an abandonment of self-pity, after feeling frozen. 'You know the stables at Winds are still full of army horses Colonel Smithson asked Mary to ride them whenever she liked. You and David must have some rides.'

It was just so she had arranged pleasures for them when they were both children and she was a tall girl of twenty.

Stella accepted her loss. There had always been David. There was no ache, no doubt about David who was three years older than she was, but had always been hers. She only appealed to Cynthia, the elder sister who must arrange her life for her now that Godfrey was gone.

'Must I go back, Cynthia . . . can't I?' She was inarticulate before the immensity of her suffering. 'It's awful,' she took a piece of bread and choked over it, the crumbs dry in her throat. 'Day after day, just the same—doing nothing. Couldn't I?'

'Yes.' Cynthia's eyes met hers with immense sympathy. 'It's been pretty bad.'

'Can't I leave?' Stella pleaded with her for life 'Do something—in a hospital or something?'

The young officers at the next table were looking at their watches, getting their bill. They were going soon by train and by boat to France. Would she ever get to France, like some of those girls who had left Maythorpe, drive an ambulance near the line?

'To be in it a bit . . .' she said, flushing suddenly. She watched the movements at the next table as though she counted the seconds. They couldn't know how awful it was to be out of it, to be left behind.

Cynthia said, watching her with kind, troubled eyes, but so aloof, so far away . . . that was Francis, Stella thought, hating Francis. 'You are too young, Stella, you know—barely sixteen.'

She could pass for more, she said eagerly. People took her for more already. She was as tall as Cynthia. Yes, Cynthia knew she had been growing . . . out of her skirts (But she had grown out of more than her skirts) Too fast, Cynthia thought, looking at her, and leaving Francis. She got a little shock. The child looked so white. It was Godfrey of course. She was terribly sorry for her, looking back on her own childhood. Death coming decently and in order had not seemed to disturb that childhood, not like this hurried,

disordered death. But she hoped very much suddenly that the War would end soon for Stella's sake, feeling for the first time that it was harder on Stella than on any of them. But if they could keep her at school—still a child (for she thought of Maythorpe as she remembered it, not knowing what the War had done there and that you couldn't shut it out) And when the War was over, Stella would have her life before her. And her good times, Cynthia thought, never having had any good times she could enjoy, because she had always been looking at the clock She had grown up at just the wrong time she thought, but it was a good thing that Stella was so young She said, 'You'll have to wait, I am afraid,' and Stella's heart fell as heavy as lead.

At the next table, the four young officers stood up and collected their belts and put them on, and went towards the door One of them stayed behind to pay the bill and Stella hoped he would be a long time about it She watched him take money from his pocket, hardly count it, saw the waitress's pleased smile as she took it. He looked across the table at Stella as he put on his belt She smelt the leather faintly, a familiar smell associated with Godfrey and David, with Maurice Liddell and with Francis, a smell of the War that had come to her with a letter, a cold piece of paper held against her face. They looked at each other across Cynthia for a moment. He was going, she thought, by train and boat to France In two hours from now—she traced his journey and saw the road up which he would go at last, a road across French country, such as she remembered from her childhood when they had gone to France for a summer holiday. Then he was gone and there was only the white bare wall behind Cynthia, whose face was lost in the blue smoke of her cigarette, and the disordered table with used glasses and plates, table napkins thrown down and the chairs pushed back where people had sat to eat and gone away. The empty table seemed to Stella to have a strange forlorn significance. It was left behind too.

Chapter 12

SHE CAME to Hurstcote station in the autumn dusk with one or two lights yellow against it, and she avoided the lights, trying to hide between them because people would recognise her and come up and say how sorry they were. Mr. Jones, the old station-master, taking her ticket, wrung her hand with his hard one. 'It's a bad day, Miss Stella.'

Outside, Mason, who had been at Winds before she was born, waited for her with the dogcart, looking straight between the pony's ears. Mason was mercifully silent, looking straight before him as he drove. Mrs Mannering wasn't using the car, so they had had to take old Peter off grass, he volunteered as they turned out of the station yard on to the road. Peter thought he'd done his work and couldn't understand it. A movement of Mason's face was hardly a smile. He broke silence again, turning off the main road on to a quiet country one. Roads weren't fit for horses these days. As slippery as ice and lorries coming and going. They'd take some getting a young horse used to, he should say Mason, sitting with his head dropped a little between his shoulders, looking at Peter's ears, was not concerned with the problem. His tone conveyed that. It wasn't likely that he'd ever have to get a young horse used to them. He and Peter both belonged to the past, only taken from the grass they had earned by this War. Peter turned off the main road on to the quiet country one, waking suddenly to something like eagerness. He had been half asleep and he slept again when he had cut the corner sharply with a sudden flourish of hoofs and wheels. The road between the high hedges swallowed them as though into quietness and peace. A smell of burning weeds floated across the hedge from the fields in the still air. Peter's hoofs fell softly on a carpet of rotting leaves. Mason broke silence as the hedges

gave place to a low wall. They'd been cutting his Lordship's woods this while back. He indicated with his whip. The whole of them would have to go, they said, wood being wanted for the War.

'We used to find the first primroses there,' Stella said, but she did not really mind about the woods. She was too young. Besides, what did trees matter in comparison with human beings? Mason was left alone with his trouble about the woods, which had been there since he was a child, and being cut down, took something from him with them.

He supposed later, his face hidden now in the dusk that came earlier to this road between the hedges than to the open main road, that Miss Stella would hardly recognise Winds since the camp came. They were all over the country, out on the Downs in little huts now that it was autumn, instead of tents. You couldn't keep a rabbit with them, or an apple unless you were to sit under a tree watching it until it was ripe enough to pick. And then Peter awoke again at the gate, turning into it with a little flourish as though he remembered his youth, and trotted briskly under the beech trees (Stella wondered absently whether they would have to go too for the War which devoured wood as well as men), to the house. Peter, drawing up, turned his head and whinnied softly 'He knows you,' Mason said. 'Peter was always cute. You could leave him to find his own way, and he'd find it in his own time.'

He leaned towards her suddenly in the dusk 'You'll find Mrs. Mannering upstairs with Master Michael, Miss Stella.' His eyes that were so blue in his rosy face searched for hers and could not find them. He was suddenly hopeless as though she had denied him possible comfort. It had been easier with Mrs. Mannering who sat all day looking at Master Michael.

Stella went into the hall where someone had forgotten to light the lights. No one had heard her come, but the

door stood open and the unlit house had the feeling of a house disordered by death. The routine of the servants had been broken and no one had forced them back to it. She faltered for a moment, standing at the foot of the stairs in the dusk. It all seemed so quiet. She supposed the dogs must be shut up in the stables. It was as though they had forgotten that she was coming, or she had come too early. She put out her hand to the banister uncertainly. Before her the stairs climbed to the light that came through the window at the top. She went up slowly, hearing the old stairs creak as she trod on each one, and passed The walls either side glimmered white and faded into a terrifying uncertainty. The stairs seemed so high climbing to that faint square of light that she wondered if she would ever reach the top. She turned towards the nursery instinctively, the old nursery where Nanny sat by the window or by the fire mending, or knitting socks, these days, for Godfrey and David. She opened the door and stood lost. There was no one there. Only the fire Nanny had left, smouldering to ash on the hearth. The uncurtained window showed grey with the evening light outside it. A small flame flickering up as though the opening of the door blew it to life showed a corner of the screen. Bluebeard's face looked out at Stella from the darkness and was lost again as the flame went out. She shut the door and stood in the corridor. There was a light at the end showing under a door. Nanny would be there of course in the new nursery with Michael. She almost ran down the corridor and opened the door. Nanny sat with Michael in her lap drying him after his bath. Somewhere in the background the young nurse hovered whom she had dispossessed temporarily because this was an occasion on which she must take command, steadyng everything and everybody. 'There,' Nanny said, peering at Michael through her glasses misted with the steam of the bath. 'There.' She dried and patted him, turned him and powdered him and turned him again, took

the soft woolly nightshirt from Bridget and slipped him into it with amazing skill.

There was no fumbling about Nanny's hands although they grew old, no sign of her failing sight in her eyes which seemed so quick behind her glasses. But she had not discovered the mist on her glasses because she saw so badly now and did nearly everything by feeling. No one knew that and she did not tell anyone.

She felt, rather than saw Stella, at the door. Mary had not seen or heard, being absorbed in Michael. She sat by the fire in a low chair watching Michael being dried in Nanny's lap. She leaned forward a little so that her eyes, her arms, all her thoughts seemed to hold only Michael. It was Nanny who said, 'Here's Stella,' and had time for Stella, handing Michael over to Bridget to be given his supper and put to bed.

Michael for the moment was more interested in Stella than in his supper, stumbling on small fat legs to meet her, taking her hand and holding it with the extraordinary strength of his baby fingers.

Mary turned to her from the low chair by the fire. There were dark rings under her eyes and she looked as if she had not slept.

'You must be tired, Stella,' she said, 'tired and cold. I am so glad you have come. You must come down and rest and have some tea.'

She stood up, still looking at Michael. She seemed to Stella so tall and thin standing beside the fire looking down at Michael. Stella knew that there wasn't anyone for Mary except Michael in the world. It was like Cynthia with Francis. She tried to reach her across Michael and failed. Mary had always been rather lovely and alarming, coming in from outside and taking Godfrey and belonging to Godfrey, but not really being part of the family. She was a bit too grand, David had said when she married Godfrey first, and had added that he'd like to see her sometimes.

with mud on her skirt, and her hair untidy like Cynthia when she'd been to bathe or had gone ratting. Cynthia was always a good sport because, of course, he knew she really hated ratting.

Now Stella thought, there was some change Mary obviously hadn't bothered what she looked like. Her hair which had always been lovely and shining and neat was rough and disordered, as though she could not be bothered to brush it. Stella wondered, looking down at her, if she would let her brush it, and the ache to do something for Mary somehow eased the pain about Cynthia. One could love Mary and do things for her and it would never hurt in the same way.

They went down to Stella's room where a fire had been lit—a wood fire as Mary explained, so it wasn't taking coal from the War. And Stella must be cold, and she must have some tea up here by the fire

There was no pain in the world that could not be made more endurable by tea drunk beside a fire. Stella adored Mary for thinking of it and Mary turned at the door to look back and fill her eyes with Michael already growing sleepy over his supper. Nanny went ahead of them, her skirts rustling in the dusk of the corridor, the sound coming back to them after Nanny had gone downstairs. She had left Michael to Bridget, turning to Stella whose need was greater now. She would bring Stella tea to her own room by the fire and Mrs. Mannering would have some too, maybe. She would not have added the last word for any of her children, Godfrey or Cynthia, or Stella, ruling them.

The rustle of her skirts drove the uncertainty before it like light chasing away shadows. When they had closed the door of the nursery behind them they had left light and warmth, and life, the young life which the nursery held, and the house before them in the dusk had had the disorder of death.

'Servants go to pieces so easily,' Mary said. 'Mrs. Bates

and Nanny can't do everything; and they've got excited since the soldiers came. Of course we are under-staffed too for the size of the house.'

The fire had died down in Stella's room and Mary knelt by it, piling the wood with hands that shook a little, bringing it to life again with a feverish haste as though something might die with the fire 'Let me do it,' Stella said, standing rather awkwardly and stupidly in her own room which seemed strange to her as though she had only come on a visit. But Mary did not hear, blowing at the fire feverishly. Nanny came, bringing a tea tray set carefully to tempt someone's appetite. 'Dinner is not till eight and then severely rationed,' Mary said. 'You'd better eat, Stella. Mrs. Bates has done wonders. She is a magician I don't know where she gets the things . . . I only hope she is not breaking the food laws.' She smiled, giving up the bellows to Nanny who held out her hand for them. But the room was full of firelight now, warm and comforting, all the shadows and uncertainty chased away. Over Mary's head Nanny made signs to Stella that she was to make her eat, but Mary ate as though the food choked her.

David came a day or two later. Stella met him with Peter at the evening train by which she had come. She wondered if he had chosen it on purpose so that he could hide as he could not in the daylight. He would have a boy's embarrassed fear of sympathy and of emotion. If only, she thought, driving Peter through the dusky lanes, one could get away where no one knew. She sat outside the station until she heard the train coming. She had meant to wait for David out here where the dusk would have deepened, sparing them both. How should they look at each other in the appalling embarrassment of this moment? She had thought—well, she would be busy with Peter (she could pretend to be, although Peter apparently slept while he waited), and David would have his luggage. They needn't look at each other, not for quite a long time until they

were out somewhere on the road to Winds, and it would be dark then. She might have slept with Peter, waiting. She had been too early after all and so they waited a long time for David, she and Peter outside the station, where she had driven Peter to the grass bank so that he could eat if he liked. Peter preferred to sleep, despising the grass.

'Well, you always knew what you wanted to do,' she thought, looking at Peter's bent head as he slept. He had always known, when they had tried to ride him as children and he had rolled them off gently and firmly on to soft grass. Peter knew his own mind, as Mason said.

The small Jones boy came out from the lit station to wake them. 'The train's coming, Miss Shall I hold him for you?' She had almost said no, looking down at Jacob's small upturned face. Then she realised suddenly that she must get there before anyone else. She must meet David and tell him it was all right, conveying it to him somehow without putting it into the indecency of words, that it wasn't like that time in their childhood when their father had died. A dim troubled memory, almost forgotten. They had been shut in the nursery, away from it all; but you couldn't shut out the feeling of death in the house. Of their mother's death, Stella who had been a baby then, knew nothing at all.

She said 'Thank you, Jacob,' and the trap creaked as she got out of it as though it had slept too, waiting as she and Peter waited, for David. Holding Peter who was so wise and old was a sinecure. She left Jacob to it in the dusk. A soft wild autumn wind blew in her face and the primitive station lamps flared and flickered in it. The train came in, deposited a few people and went on again. She met David under one of the flickering lamps. His round childish face looked pale under his hard cap. He was usually so rosy, and that made him look even younger than he was, so that he was sensitive about it. Once when

they were going to France as children for a summer holiday a lady on the boat had stopped him and said, 'You are just like a little apple I would like to eat you.' For some reason David always resented the happening and was angry even now when reminded of it.

He was disturbed and frightened and embarrassed as she had known he would be His hand in hers when they met, his stumbling question at her ear as they went out into the quiet road where Jacob waited for them with Peter: 'Is Mary . . . terribly cut up?' told her that.

'Mary's splendid,' she said 'You needn't be afraid,' and felt his immense relief. 'Shall I drive or you?' She fumbled in her pocket for sixpence for Jacob. Peter, turning his head to her in the dusk, might have been telling her that Jacob hadn't earned it.

'You,' David said, 'I don't suppose I could get old Peter to move'

'How long have you got?' she stirred Peter to life with difficulty They left the station with its flickering lights behind them and drove into the darkness She felt the soft wind against her face.

'A week. It wasn't due in the ordinary way of course. Special leave.'

'Yes' She turned to look at him She wanted to feel him and make sue. Behind them in the little country station, quiet and empty now, one of the lamps flickered in the wind and went out. Life was like that now, wavering, uncertain and suddenly blown out His shoulder was against hers. She felt the squareness of it and smelt the smell of leather before the wind in her face blew it away and left other smells to confuse it. She said, searching the dusk for him and finding his face at last.

'Is there any news . . . yet?'

'Not yet. It might be any time. A draft, you know. One doesn't know often till the night before. A fellow I knew, Bellamy, missed death by being out to dinner when

the order came. They put another man on instead of him. It was a long time ago and an ill-fated draft. . . . Gallipoli.'

'Oh . . . Gallipoli.' She sighed as though Gallipoli was some terror over long ago which had never touched them, could never touch them (*it was over long ago*), a nightmare terror which swallowed men up—a whole draft, leaving no trace, no survivor, to whisper, to hint at what had happened. 'I suppose it will be France,' she said, trying to see Peter's ears against the road. She found one of them and lost it again. The hedges grew higher, shutting out the light. They went down hill into darkness, a chasm, terrifying—Gallipoli. She shut the terror out, supposing he would go to France where terrible things had happened, but where surely, she searched the darkness for reassurance and was only half assured, whole drafts did not disappear, leaving no trace. France was a country one knew, where one had once dug sand castles on a wide yellow beach, and bathed and gone to village fairs and had walked home along a white dusty road tired as only a child can be tired, dazed with it. It was a country where people lived, and Life might meet Death at least on equal terms.

'I'd rather go to France,' David agreed with her as though she had spoken. 'Than Salonika or anywhere. Mails better and supplies better. You can count on your food anyway, unless during a bad show.' He turned his face to her in the darkness. 'And if you're hit, you're pretty close to home, anyhow.' He was conveying to her his knowledge, facts acquired from other men who had been there, as a schoolboy might learn the tradition of a school slowly from his seniors. He shared them with her and that was a comfort. She went to France with him while Peter found his own way home, as Mason said he would, in his own time, in the quietness of the autumn country. A short journey even if the sea was rough as it nearly always

seemed to be and not enough basins on a troop ship, but you had a pretty fair chance of getting over without being chased. And a fair chance of meeting people you knew, in Havre or Étaples when you got there, or even when you were going up. You never knew—it was extraordinary how fellows did meet out there . . . their own brothers.

He broke off. They were at the edge of a chasm as deep, as yawning as Gallipoli. He had forgotten. His eyes turned to meet hers in the darkness were appalled. They could not find each other, but she knew he had forgotten. It meant less than the sudden sweeping away of all comfort, all security which she had tried to build up, supposing he would go to France where at least supplies were good and hospitals good and it wasn't so far to get home if one was hit, and where out of a draft, surely one wounded man must be left to tell what had happened. She was suddenly cold inside her clothes, as she had been that night at school when her nightdress had been wet against her body. She moved a little so that she could feel him, her arm against his, her shoulder against his. Elaborately, she concealed all trace of her desire to touch him, but moving her hand as though by accident, she felt the hard leather of his belt. It was cold. The road dipped before them into a tunnel of trees. They went down together into an abyss. . . . Gallipoli. . . . France.

Chapter 13

BUT THE trouble was they couldn't go together. He shared his knowledge with her during that week's leave as though he knew; the knowledge acquired from other men who had been there, like the tradition of a school learned slowly by a new boy. She was quick, anxious, listening, careful to keep up because of that terror of being left behind. They went to the very edge of the abyss and looked over. She was only breathless because of that terror that she might not keep up, that she might lose him on the road if he went faster than she did. He must go alone eventually, but if she knew enough she could go too, not shut out, although her body would be back at Maythorpe learning things that did not matter at all. She learnt quickly, patiently, things that did matter, building the road for herself. The road at this time became part of her life. She saw it wind across flat country through cornfields, white and dusty and endless like a French road on which they had walked in their childhood with no shade anywhere, no trees. There had been trees on the main roads of course, but there wasn't much left of them now. Or it was winter and it had rained, and the road was a sea of mud. Men going up to the line bent under the weight of their equipment, stumbled and slipped in it. And the rain began again.

The road was familiar to her, a part of her life like the names of towns she had never seen, which were yet more familiar than any towns she knew. Bapaume, Ypres, Menin, Loos. People one knew had been killed in these places. They stamped themselves on her childhood, being part of it, to be remembered afterwards when many closer memories would be forgotten. They were part of life, of the making of life in those important, ineffaceable years. She accepted them in common with all her generation, not realis-

ing their importance. The road belonged to all of them.

It formed clearly for her, a picture made quite unconsciously from the talk she had heard always it seemed—two years were so long a space of time at that age, covering almost all one could remember, from Godfrey's letters and his talk when he came on leave, or from something Maurice Liddell told her, or other soldiers' talk, and from war books and pictures left about in rooms at school or at home, again almost as long as she could remember. Already life before the War was blotted out for people of her age. There were maps too which she traced with David, elaborately concealing with a new cunning what she was trying to do. They had always shared a passion for maps and they had liked roads, especially the roads that ran round the edge of a hill circling it, with endless suggestions and possibilities. There had been one in Ireland when they stayed with Aunt Nancy, which cut a mountain in two. The Devil's Gap it was called. Anything might lie the other side of the Devil's Gap.

The road lengthened as she learned. A chance phrase, a chance story of David's as he found the way himself, making it out of what he had heard from other men, made another mile of it. It ran through ruined villages with always a church in the middle, past low French farmhouses where there had once been gardens and orchards. She knew it so well that she never wondered how she came to know it. It was as familiar, as intimate as the road that ran to Winds. A picture seen somewhere—Early Morning, Flanders, gave her more. Black figures against grey dawn, a road across incredibly flat country, a few twisted trees, mud, and such coldness and greyness as is only to be found in that hour of dawn. She learned other things from David, always with that strange new cunning, concealing her anxiety to learn as she had concealed her desire to touch him, driving beside him from the station. The things he knew and had heard were facts to be accepted. She ac-

cepted them, meeting his eyes with no horror in hers. None of these things could possibly happen to them. Everyone in the War knew that. Else how could one have lived?

He stood by her bed with a candle while it was still dark. He had got the kitchen fire to light (She remembered his old passion for lighting fires which had frightened her in heather and woods, but was often useful now) He had put the kettle on, and if she would get up they could have some tea and bread and butter before they rode. It was luck getting the army horses and that Colonel Smithson was so stiff that he was not particularly keen. He went away and down through the sleeping house, careful not to wake Mary or Michael, but she heard the old stairs creak under him as he went, and another board creaked long after he had passed.

Her fingers were cold, putting on her riding breeches, familiar and always unfamiliar. They smelt of leather which had come in these days to be a disturbing smell. The dawn coming, filled the room with grey cold light in which she saw her own face as she brushed her hair and tied it behind her head, with the schoolgirl's black bow. She felt a little sick as she had felt getting up in an agony of excitement to go hunting in the Christmas holidays before the War. Her hands tying the ribbon were awkward and clumsy, the white shirt was cold until she pulled a woollen jersey over it. But riding breeches were warm, comforting things to put on on an autumn morning when one was frozen. The house was full of the grey cold light. She broke some spell going down the stairs, waking them as David had wakened them and they had slept again when he had gone. She tried to walk quietly past Mary's door, but it wasn't possible in riding boots. She saw her own reflection in the mirror at the top of the stairs as she went down the passage. When she reached the hall a board in the passage upstairs creaked where she had passed. Or perhaps it was only where someone else had passed long ago. She left the stairs and the house asleep again. In the stone kitchen pas-

sage the grey early morning light parted before her like mist, and closed behind her when she had passed. She pushed open the kitchen door and saw the great kitchen in the half light with the glow from the range where David stood, bending over the fire. The kitchen was unchanged, the only room in the house she recognised and she stood in the doorway and stared at it. It held her childhood as the nursery held it (but she had found the nursery dark and empty). David had the firelight on his face. 'We'll be late,' he said, without turning his head. 'I thought you were never coming.' She had an impulse to argue, to quarrel. She and David had hardly ever quarrelled. But something to break up the strain of this atmosphere in which they were all so careful not to hurt each other. (It had been like that at school too, lately.) It was unnatural, frightening, like people living on the edge of a precipice, careful not to push each other over. She thought, if she and David quarrelled here in the kitchen which seemed the only familiar room in the house, it would be a relief. She watched him and he turned his face to her and smiled and she blinked at him. 'Oh David, David.' She had only thought it, not cried it aloud. But she knew that she would never quarrel with David again.

'The kettle's boiling,' he said. She sat on the kitchen table and warmed her hands, holding them round her cup. The tea was comforting, reassuring. And it was splendid of David to get the fire going so soon. She felt warm, swinging her legs a little in her riding boots as she sat on the table. Everything was more bearable when one was warm.

They left the kitchen full of firelight which caught the cold grey morning light as it came through the window and turned it rosy. Outside it was chilly and raw. David shivered, turning up the collar of his coat. 'You warm enough?' He turned to look at her as she walked beside him with the stride that these clothes demanded.

'Yes.'

You couldn't be warm enough of course; not in a stable yard at this hour when the cobblestones under your feet and the long line of the stables and the roof against the sky were cold and grey, and even the stables themselves inside the door had the feeling of a room in the morning where a fire has gone out during the night.

'I'll have the mare,' she said, in the voice, half a whisper, in which people speak in stables at that hour. 'She's Colonel Smithson's own and awfully nice. She's got a lovely mouth.' The mare turned her head and looked at her, pointing her soft ears as though she had heard. They rode out of the yard, leaving it still grey and cold and asleep.

A movement of one of the horses left behind in the stables was only like someone stirring in sleep, and there was quietness again after. The sun came as they rode out of the gate, making patches of light on the wall, which moved and danced in a sudden wind and the mare pointed her ears and shied, swerving quickly. The sunlight coming through the trees danced and played all the way down the avenue, and the horses shied at it, being cold and fresh.

Out on the Downs a light frost still lay in patches in shady places, and the unreal early morning sunlight shone on the gossamers in the bushes, making them look as though a veil of silver had been spun over them. They let the horses go and got warm. Speed was comforting. The world raced by on either side and the wind in Stella's eyes and in her ears blinded and deafened her. The grey-green turf before her and on either side seemed half hidden in mist, unreal, dreamlike. She let the mare have her head and flew through life and space in that dream. She could hear David's horse thundering beside her and could see the turf, mile on mile, stretching away before them to the sky. The cold wind against her face made her eyes water, so that when she turned once and looked at David she could not see him. There was only the thudding of a

horse's hoofs and the thudding of the mare's feet under her on the soft turf, an unreal sound on unreal early morning hills.

If one could ride for ever with the wind in one's ears, in one's eyes, blind and deaf There would be no room for anything else, for feeling, for pain. All the intolerable time of inaction at Maythorpe she had waited for this. She leaned forward, almost standing in the stirrups, her hands low as though she were riding a race. She bent her head a little before the wind, level with the mare's neck. She could only see the turf below her now, mile upon mile of it, slipping away under them and left behind. But when Gypsy slackened her pace a little and she straightened herself she saw the line of the Downs just above her, cutting the sky.

They rode to the edge of the world and looked over. Below them in the valley, chimneys smoked and life was stirring. Far away, the Channel, a line of silver, glimmered in the sunlight. Men went that way to France.

'You won,' David said. 'We gave it up quite a long time ago.' He leaned forward to stroke his horse's neck. 'I shouted at you once. There were rabbit holes You didn't hear.'

She looked at him through a mist made by the watering of her eyes. She saw him against the skyline for a moment, his square shoulders outlined against it, and the horse of which he seemed a part.

'It has been a lovely ride,' she said soberly, turning the mare's head towards the valley. They went down, threading their way between stones, slipping and stumbling a little. Her eyes were still wet, and he thought, feeling embarrassed about it, that she had been crying. They rode home silently. You couldn't talk when you knew that you had come to the end of a life.

Chapter 14

THEY MADE a pretence of it at Winds, from which David and Stella, for whose sake the pretence was made, stood outside. Cynthia coming for a long week-end suggested a rat hunt at breakfast. The ditches were full of them—all the rats of the countryside collected at Winds since the camp came in the summer. Francis' terriers were famous ratters, and Jack an old hand at the game. The dogs, lying stretched by the windows in a strip of sunlight, stirred hearing their names, lifted their heads for a moment, wagged feeble tails and slept again.

Cynthia smiled at David suggesting the rat hunt and the smile was like a shadow chasing the sunlight from her face. The smile was something that held you off, hiding her thoughts. Behind it Cynthia lived, thinking of Francis. David unexpectedly wasn't particularly keen. Rats were rather disgusting things and they squealed horribly. And only Stella guessed some new knowledge of rats that made him loathe them. She looked at him quickly across the table, but he was not looking her way. She remembered that he had once moved the oat bin in the stable and a rat had run out and he had speared it through with a pitch-fork. It had squealed horribly and she had run away, her hands over her ears, hiding her eyes, until it was over. David had pretended not to mind, but she didn't think he had liked it much.

Mary came in then with Michael in her arms. Cynthia had made Mary stay in bed for breakfast, although she herself looked more as if she needed it. Michael, being put down gently, stumbled on his small uncertain feet to the window where David sat.

'Hullo, old man,' David held out his hand and the small fingers clung to it for a moment. David's clothes with the

shining buttons and the belt with all its funny little knobs were endlessly fascinating. The small fingers let his hand go to explore these exciting things.

'You're growing, Michael,' David said, looking down at him in a funny embarrassed way. Mary stood by the fire and watched David, who was so different from Godfrey as a younger and older brother often are. Every year between them might have gone to blot out any possible likeness. 'You mustn't let him bother you,' she said, leaning one arm against the chimneypiece as though she was tired. 'Don't let him be a nuisance.' And David said, still in that embarrassed way, looking down at him, that he was a jolly little chap.

Instead of the rat hunt, about which Cynthia, going back to Francis, was obviously relieved, David called Stella into his room which faced hers on the landing at the top of the house. They were two long attic rooms with sloping roofs and low windows, and up here they had been well away from the rest of the house to play any games they chose. They had played all sorts of games, making coffee in a tin over a candle, lighting wood fires and making toffee, learning to smoke surreptitiously. All these things were somehow in the atmosphere of the room.

David had a tidying fit, opening the big cupboard at one end of the room which held the accumulation of his life (they had run to hide the coffee tin and the candle and the cigarettes in it when they had heard anyone coming), letters, papers, books, a riding whip, a pair of spurs. The papers and books smelt musty, Stella thought, standing in the doorway when he called. He thought, standing with his back to her looking into the cupboard, that he might not have another chance. One did keep such a lot of things one didn't really want. Yes, she thought—even David who was so tidy, kept lots of things, musty papers and books, which he didn't really want.

And after all, he said, still with his back to her (how

much easier it made conversation of this kind) the house would belong to that kid Michael one of these days, and he didn't want anyone else to have the bother of moving his things. 'You see,' he said, his head half in the cupboard as though he addressed the papers and books that smelt mustily. 'One never knows. They try to give you leave before. But it might be during a bad show—if men were wanted—twenty-four hours' leave only. One wouldn't have much time or want to spend it doing this.'

She agreed that one wouldn't want to spend it doing this, and sat on the bed, while David cleared out the cupboard, sorted papers and destroyed them, and wondered if she would ever in all her life forget the smell of papers taken from a cupboard long shut up. The cupboard held the accumulation of a life—David's short life

She said in sudden terror when the smell filled the room, lay over it like a fog pushing away the sunlight, 'Do you want to do it now, David? Your leave is so short. Couldn't I do it for you—afterwards?'

He shook his head, still with his back to her. There were things one had to do oneself. The phrase shut her outside. She sat with her hands empty and wondered afterwards why they hadn't collected wood and lit a fire, because the room was so cold. But when she thought of it, it was nearly lunch-time and it wasn't worth while.

He had always been tidy, tidier than she was as Nanny had complained. 'And you a girl, Stella.' David had turned Nanny out of the room when she came to pack for him to go to Sandhurst. It was half, he had said, done already. Nanny had looked at the bed spread with neat piles of garments and lifted up her hands.

'There, you could learn from him, Stella.'

Stella hadn't learned from him; not that. She was younger than David, but had always felt older because boys of course were younger than girls. She had been conscious vaguely of her own superiority and David had

accepted it. They had never disagreed about what they should do, but she had had her way.

Now the tables were turned. And she sat on the bed with her hands empty and so cold in her lap and listened to the rustling of papers and looked at David's shoulders between the two open doors of the cupboard and thought he might have been Godfrey standing like that. When you saw people's backs in uniform they looked so exactly alike, even Godfrey and David, who were so different that they might have belonged to different families.

Now Godfrey was dead and Cynthia had gone away to some mysterious country with Francis, living there even while she looked at you from behind that smile which hid her completely. You couldn't get at Cynthia any longer, not being even sure that she heard when you spoke to her.

Nanny came while David stood at the cupboard, his arms full of books.

'Tidying David. You could learn from him, Stella. And you a girl.'

'I wish I wasn't, Nanny,' she said in sudden, intolerable irritation.

'Why, Stella, to talk like that.' Nanny spoke absently, adoring David from the door. 'I couldn't do that for you, my lamb?' the endearment must have slipped out. David wasn't even a schoolboy any longer. He had become a man when he went to Sandhurst.

David spoke into the cupboard, standing between the two open doors, his head and shoulders lost. 'No, Nanny. But I expect you'll find some socks to darn if you look in that chest of drawers.'

He turned to smile at her, giving her so much comfort. David had always thought of things like that. Different from most boys, Nanny would have said.

'How are those socks you are knitting for me getting on, Nanny?' he asked, opening a book and closing it again. He put it down on the bed beside Stella, with a pile of

similar books, Army instruction and exercise books with red covers. They were new among so many old things which the cupboard held. Stella opened one of them, while Nanny answered about the socks, 'There'll be plenty for you, David.'

'All ranks must be trained in the following,' Stella read. '*Bayonet fighting produces lust for blood; much may be accomplished in billets in wet weather, as well as out of doors on fine days.*' David was still at school then. In billets on wet days (when one couldn't play games). One could play with a bayonet though, learning the spirit of it. 'All ranks,' she read, '*must be taught that their aim and object is to come to close quarters with the enemy as quickly as possible so as to be able to use the bayonet. This must become a second nature.*'

She turned over a page.

General Remarks. A Platoon Commander . . . (She had been so proud thinking of David commanding a platoon until he pointed out to her that it was the lowest commissioned rank in the Army. She had acquired by now—an almost complete knowledge of Army ranks and the duties of each.) *A platoon commander, she read, will have gone a long way towards having a well-trained platoon if he has gained the confidence of his N.C.O.s-and men and has established a high soldierly spirit in all ranks. The confidence of his men could best be gained . By being the best man at arms in his platoon or trying to be. By looking after his men's comfort before his own and never sparing himself.* (David would do that, she thought.) *By being blood-thirsty and for ever thinking how to kill the enemy and helping his men to do so.*

It was a relief to turn to Village Fighting and Wood Fighting, titles which suggested what a war ought to be, but she was not shocked or horrified. She accepted these things as anyone accepts something they have always known. She hid the books when David looked round.

Nanny was saying that there would be plenty of socks for him. Yes, she thought, there would be plenty for David. They had all been knitting them for Godfrey too. But Godfrey didn't want any more socks now. Nanny was troubled. 'I heard you going out this morning, the two of you.' (She blamed Stella, Stella thought) 'I went after you, but you had gone, with nothing to eat, I wouldn't wonder.'

David laughed. 'We had tea and bread and butter, Nanny. I'll ask if I can take you to the Front with me to look after me, give me tea in the morning and see that I change my clothes if I get wet. Have you got some socks to darn?' He went to her and put his arms about her shoulders. Stella, sitting on the bed with her cold hands in her lap, saw Nanny's face turned to his. She felt no resentment, remembering Nanny saying a thousand times in their childhood, 'You're not like David, Stella.'

She had accepted it. No one was like David and David was hers. She felt the hard coldness of the exercise book in her hands. It was full of notes written in David's neat handwriting. She must read the notes. She read them secretly. *Notes on Gas Warfare. Action during and after a gas attack. Treatment of gas casualties. Send back to the M.O. all serious cases, (a) all blue cases (very dangerous), (b) all white cases (showing signs of collapse).*

Administer warmth and stimulant. REST, physical and mental (don't put wind up him)!

She read the notes in David's handwriting. She was frightened, losing a few feet, a few steps on the road on which David was ahead of her. She would never be in a gas attack, but David would.

'If I'd known you were going to stay here long doing that, my lamb,' Nanny said, 'I'd have lit a fire. The room would be better for it, I wouldn't wonder. It smells damp.' Her face was anxious, turned towards the bed, as though she suspected damp sheets to give her nursling a chill.

David said, 'I *must* take you to the Front, Nanny. Why, I wouldn't be afraid of anything with you to look after me.' He squeezed her shoulders with his arm about them. Stella, watching Nanny's face, knew that he hurt her. David didn't guess how strong his grip was. He pushed the old nurse towards the door. 'You shall give us bread and honey before we ride to-morrow morning, Nanny—as you used to when we went cubbing.'

Sudden loss showed in Nanny's face. Her hands full of David's socks felt still empty and cold. Perhaps the socks were damp, she thought anxiously. She had given Godfrey bread and honey when he went cubbing before the War; getting up in the dark to make sure he ate it. One of these days she'd be doing the same for Michael. But she looked at David who had always been her favourite.

'They won't be sending you out for a while yet, David?' She thought in her simple, logical way, hadn't they taken enough with Master Godfrey?

'Not for a while, Nanny, I expect. You see, I am not sure I know how to shoot yet.'

'They're teaching you?' She tried to understand and failed

'Yes.'

She went away down the long corridor to the nursery carrying the socks and one or two other garments that she thought wanted mending, against her breast. They felt cold—damp she wouldn't wonder; no one to look after the young gentlemen at a place like that.

Nanny ruled the nursery as she had ruled it long ago, while the under-nurse, terrified of her, looked after Michael. Going in, she found the room empty and sat down by the fire and opened David's socks one by one, holding them to the light. Michael, coming in with Bridget from his morning outing and running to her, hardly comforted her. She hung the socks on the high fender which had been moved into the new nursery to protect Michael

now from the fire, as it had protected *her* children earlier (Michael wasn't hers really and she knew it). She took one and threaded a needle carefully, matching the wool from her basket. She mended David's socks and aired them. When the fire had warmed them, some coldness went too from her thin breast against which so many children had lain.

Cynthia found her there, holding the sock to the light, her face showing the strain it was to see even with glasses.

'Nanny,' Cynthia put so much into the simple word, all her childhood, all the lovely life that was gone. She saw it in this old woman sitting by the fire with a sock held to the light. 'Couldn't someone else do that. . . . Bridget?'

'They're David's.'

Michael, running across the room with a toy held out to show, brought no change to Nanny's face

Cynthia thought or said: 'Oh. They're David's.' And looked at Nanny, who had loved them all but with whom there was no room now for anyone but David. She sat down and lifted Michael on to her lap, feeling sorry for him. But after all he had Mary and no one to share Mary with, now that Godfrey was dead. She said softly across the child's head, 'They're sending Mr. Godfrey's things home, Nanny. We'll have to unpack them, you and I, and keep them from Mrs. Mannering.'

The child moved restlessly in her arms. He felt them less secure than Nanny's, which for some bewildering reason did not open to him. They seemed to him empty, but he could not see that they held David. He struggled and Cynthia let him go. There was no such comfort here as he would find against the cold stiffness of Nanny's apron and Nanny's thin breast warmed by so many children who had lain against it. He dropped down from Cynthia's lap and stumbled a little, and no one saw. If anyone had seen he would have cried, assuring them how much he was hurt. But no one had seen, and having discovered that amazing

fact, he realised too that they were not thinking of him. He turned his wide eyes from one to another. They had forgotten him. And the wide blue eyes that were Godfrey's eyes, although all the rest of him was his mother, turned to his toys. He went back to them, playing a quiet game such as a child plays when he knows that for the moment at least he is quite shut out and forgotten.

'All his things?' Nanny asked, her lips hardly moving. She sat still with the sock in her hand.

'All his things. His equipment, his papers and books. Whatever he had with him. His clothes too, I suppose.'

She went away suddenly, leaving Nanny sitting still by the fire, the sock in her hand. She was wondering what they were going to do with Master Godfrey's clothes. (She had spoken of him as Master Godfrey officially since he had grown up, but he had always been Godfrey to her. Now she called him Master Godfrey because of the dignity of death.) With his clothes and his belt and his boots and all the rest. She looked at the sock in her hand through the glasses which were misted a little, took them off and wiped them and saw no clearer. Mr. Godfrey's clothes, she thought stupidly. Well, they'd unpack them, she supposed, but not when Mrs. Mannering was about. She surmised only vaguely that there was some particular reason for not doing it when Mrs. Mannering was about, some reason which Miss Cynthia knew. They'd want to be hung up awhile and then folded neatly and put away, with moth powder or else the moth would have them. They would have to be careful about moth. She stared at a small hole in David's sock which was like the hole a moth made.

Cynthia went down the corridor and stood at the door of David's room. She looked in, made sure he was there, went across the floor and put her hand on his shoulder to make more sure, feeling the khaki cloth and wondering why it felt so different from ordinary clothes. She moved her hand over his shoulders as Stella had moved hers, driving beside

him from the station, but she pretended too that it didn't mean anything, affecting an elaborate carelessness with an elaborately careless question. 'Tidying, David? It's nearly lunch-time.' He turned and smiled at her and she went out of the room without speaking. He was a little shy of Cynthia, since she had changed, going away to Francis. He did not know why she had come that way and gone at once. She went down the corridor thinking of the smell of uniform and leather and of Francis wearing that uniform in a German prison camp but still alive.

In the nursery Nanny looked up from her mending. 'We'll be folding them and putting them away,' she said. 'Mr. Godfrey's clothes, I mean. You'll be wanting moth powder if you'll be thinking of it, Miss Cynthia.' She put the needle in and out, in and out of David's sock, mending it.

Chapter 15

DAVID went back to Salisbury Plain, leaving his bedroom door open, and the room tidy inside, with a terrible tidiness, characteristic of David. Nanny coming to comfort herself, putting things straight in David's room, found nothing to do and wandered about uncertainly, an old woman with her hands empty trying to hold something with them. She took into them Godfrey's things which were sent home, filling the house with an atmosphere of a funeral. (Stella knew then that Godfrey was dead.)

Nanny had it all ready—the moth powder—they'd hang them up first though, and of course to begin with they must be unpacked. She and Miss Cynthia would do it together. (She had given Cynthia the title of Miss incongruously on her marriage.) She could leave Michael altogether to Bridget for a day or two while she saw to Godfrey's things. Relinquishing Michael she gave up something that had never been hers, turning back to Godfrey's things as though to security Her children. So many of them were dead now that she might have felt greater company with the dead than with the living. She left Michael being dried after his bath, in Bridget's lap. Bridget, whom Nancy Creagh had sent from Ireland before the War, was young and rosy and gay and she played endless games with Michael who adored her. He did not look round when Nanny went out of the room, walking rather slowly on her tired old feet, and closed the door.

She went down the long passage which was shadowy in the dusk, finding her way with certainty as she would have found it anywhere in the house although her eyes were dim behind her glasses. A little rustle of her starched skirts went with her as it had gone to comfort a child twenty-

three years before. That was Nanny's sound. No other skirts rustled just like hers.

It had brought security, comfort to many children, who turned suddenly from darkness and fear, to sleep peacefully because she came, and the world with her coming was stable and kind. The sound reached the door of Godfrey's room before she did. It might have been twenty years earlier and Nanny following her skirts 'Did you call, my lamb?'—a soft whisper in the darkness because they guarded together that secret of his fear of the dark when he first went to sleep alone. He was ashamed, thinking of his manhood at seven years old, but it did not matter about Nanny so long as no one else knew.

The rustle of her skirts obscured her footsteps as they hid her legs, swollen from the burden of life which they had carried for so long; so many children, frightened and cold and sick children looking for comfort in her arms, their faces turned to her breast.

Nanny's skirts came and Nanny with them, peering in at the open door of Godfrey's room. She had seen to it herself since the telegram came, sweeping and dusting as though it was still occupied, but choosing a time when Mrs. Mannering wouldn't be in her room next door.

They had sent Godfrey's luggage up, not knowing what else to do with it; Mason and one of the maids carrying it up the stairs with difficulty, panting under it, and leaving it in Godfrey's room as though it waited to be unpacked and Godfrey's things taken out of it for him to use. Nanny coming in, peering a little, almost fell over the tin box on which the white letters showed strangely in the dusk. Captain G. W. Mannering. They glimmered against the dark tin of the box like writing on paper that has been burnt showing clearly for a moment before the paper falls to ashes. There was someone there and Nanny caught her breath. 'Miss Cynthia. I didn't know they'd come until just now.'

'Cynthia's out, Nanny.' Mary moved from the window

where she had been standing, one hand on the writing-table where there were pens and ink and paper set ready for someone to write as in a room prepared for a visitor. She had been standing there for a long time, not moving, not thinking. It was almost dark. Moving a little stiffly, she was cold.

It wasn't easy with Mrs. Mannermg who had never been her child. Nanny hesitated as she did not often hesitate, ruling the house. She peered at Mary in the dusk and could not see her face. She felt lost with no clue at all. With Miss Cynthia she would have known.

'I heard you coming, Nanny.' Mary stood with her back to the light, so tall and thin against the window. She stooped a little, her face lost in the shadows. Nanny searching among them could not find her. She must wait and she waited, and found the unaccustomed inaction intolerable.

But Mary had heard her coming, the rustle of her skirts before her feet reached the door. The sound had not been more reassuring twenty years earlier when it had come to a child frightened of the dark.

Mary had been lost in darkness, in a room which smelt of leather and mud, and tobacco and Godfrey. She had stood so long beside the writing-table, her hand on it, not knowing what to do. Nanny had pushed the door behind her, but she had not shut it. Jack, scratching at it, opened it easily. His paws on the bare floor between the rugs sounded with a deafening noise in the quiet room. He smelt something at once, whining a little, padded softly to the kit-bag on the floor at the foot of the bed, smelt it, whimpered over it, turned his face from one to the other of the watchers in the dark. Why weren't they as joyful as he was, since Godfrey had come home?

'He won't come back any more, Jack,' Mary said.

Her voice broke some spell that had kept the room quiet and still, stirred Nanny to action from her intolerable inaction. She called Jack; would have coaxed him from the room, but Mary stopped her. 'Let him stay.' She sat down

as though she had stood for so long uncertainly by the window that she was tired. The dog went to her and laid his head on her knee. -

'He won't come back any more, Jack,' she said, stroking his soft forehead between his ears. As though she had laid some burden on him too heavy to carry, he dropped his head lower between her knees.

She looked at Nanny across him, seeing only her figure in the dusk.

'Cynthia wanted to keep it from me,' she said. 'I know. But there are things one has to do oneself. You couldn't shut me outside this room where these things are. You and I, perhaps, Nanny. . . .'

'To-morrow, my lamb,' Nanny said, and her skirts rustled a little in the dusk as though they felt her restoration to power and certainty. It had come with that appeal of Mary's, 'You and I, perhaps, Nanny.' She had been lost, uncertain until Mary's uncertainty restored her.

'To-morrow, my lamb.' The phrase slipped out. 'We'll light a fire here. There's all that wood David and Stella gathered. It is cold now, so cold and dark. You wouldn't be doing it in the dark and cold.'

Mary sat with the dog's head between her knees.
'Couldn't we light a fire now?'

Nanny looked at her across the pile of luggage, a dim shape in the dusk. The room felt chilly and damp since they came, although she had kept it aired.

'Now, then.' She went downstairs to the kitchen premises which she did not often enter, there being something like an armed neutrality between her and Mrs. Bates although they respected each other. The younger servants accepted Nanny's position in the house. Annie, the young housemaid who was only waiting for her twenty-first birthday to join the W.A.A.C.s met her in the passage and asked her politely, 'Can I get you anything, Mrs. Williams?' The Mrs. was brevet rank. There had never been a Mr. Williams.

She said: 'No thank you, Annie,' and went on along the stone passage. It was cold down here in the servants' quarters built according to the ideas of many years earlier half underground although space over ground was of no value. Light came through the open door of the kitchen and the sound of voices; but Nanny was shut outside. No one else could be brought into it, or into that room upstairs where Mary sat with the dog's head between her knees, and the air grew heavier and heavier with the smell of leather and mud-stained cloth and canvas. From the cupboard where such things were kept, she took firewood and newspapers. Almost furtively she filled a scuttle with coal. It was too heavy for her, but she was terrified of someone coming to help her, insisting on carrying it upstairs. Mason perhaps. She had something in common with Mason because they were both old; and he wouldn't talk. Or even Mrs. Bates. But she could not get at Mrs. Bates without letting in those young staring girls in the kitchen; and she didn't know where Mason was. She fumbled, dropping the coal and was terrified that it would bring someone to discover what she was doing. Her hands were clumsy in their haste and secrecy. She bent half double trying to see, an old, frightened, half-blind woman gathering sticks and coal to make a fire; a fire that should shut out death and the smell of death. The scuttle was full at last—there was wood upstairs she remembered, in the log box at the top of the stairs. But she'd take the coal in case it wouldn't burn. You never knew with wood.

She had to stop more than once on the stairs to get her breath. Her tired feet and ankles ached. But coming into the room she showed no sign that she had faltered, fumbled like any other helpless old woman. Mary sat as she had left her with the dog's head between her knees. But it was darker than it had been a few minutes earlier when Nanny went downstairs.

She thought with frightened irritability, kneeling by the

hearth, that Jack knew then, to make things worse. She couldn't think how he knew.

She had always been able to light a fire easily, quickly, in an emergency when a child woke crouping, or with a chill. She had learnt it so long ago that she could not remember having learnt it. The sticks gathered from the woods where they had lain for years when no one troubled to gather them, were dry. The fire blazed up, warming the room which had felt so cold. The smell of wood burning overpowered that other smell of leather and cloth and canvas, all cold and damp and smelling of death. The fire crackled cheerfully as though there had never been any pain in the world. It lit up the walls, turning them rosy, caught a gold tinge in Mary's hair and was reflected in Jack's eyes when he turned to the hearth for the comfort which no dog could resist. He was ashamed of his weakness seeking that comfort, and he pressed his body to the ground in his shame and sorrow, creeping to the fire. He lay down beside it with his head on his paws, his eyes staring into the flames, his white body turned copper colour in the firelight, which was on Nanny's white apron too making it rose and gold; such an enormous expanse of it, Mary thought, watching her.

Nanny was wondering, staring into the fire, what they'd find there when they unpacked His socks and handkerchiefs as well as his uniforms maybe, and they'd want washing, and what would they do with them afterwards? There were those socks they had knitted for him; would they be there? She remembered with relief that they threw away socks out there not being able to wash them. But there would be papers he'd have kept; letters—from Mrs. Mandering maybe. Her face turned to the firelight was rosy, her anxious eyes hidden behind her glasses. When she moved, Mary heard the rustling sound of her skirts which steadied a whole world trembling and shaking on the edge of an abyss.

Chapter 16

CYNTHIA hadn't meant to stay. She had meant to go back to London and her work in hospital, broken only by her letters to Francis. For Godfrey belonged to Mary and Winds too would be Michael's one of these days. And, a little frightened on the edge of insecurity, she thanked God anyhow that she had Francis.

Mary felt vaguely that Godfrey dying had gone away from her. He belonged to Winds, but she had come in from outside. As a family they loved each other too much for anyone to be quite sure, who had come in from outside. If they had been richer or poorer, it would not have been the same. They permitted themselves a certain indulgence in their love only possible in a life where there is no struggle for existence. The house was part of it. No great house with many empty rooms making a fantasy of the thing for which a house is made, could have held a life as Winds held it, as no small house where people are too close for dignity and mutual respect could have held it. No army of gardeners could have made the gardens what they were. Cynthia, in the few days which were all she had meant to spend at Winds, weeded and tidied desperately, making only a little oasis in the general ruin. Mason helped her and old Burns the gardener at their nearest neighbour's came one October afternoon and looked at what she had done, sadly. He couldn't make headway against the weeds over at Avening, and only one or two idle boys to help him. He couldn't get about much or stoop much because of the rheumatism and if you took your eyes off those boys they were idling. Boys, Burns grumbled. The band boys from the camp had taken the best of his apples, and what they had left the older men had taken, creeping through the orchards in the evening when you couldn't see them in the mist. Old

Burns' eyes were dim, but he wouldn't acknowledge that. He had heard them laugh as they broke through a hedge beyond the mist, but he couldn't see them. (They might have been ghosts of men used to creeping through mist and cutting their way through wire, returned to the peace of that apple orchard and apple stealing. Burns did not think of that, concerned only with his apples)

The overgrown garden at Winds troubled him. A warm sunny garden, it had always been. A kind garden. His cold face warmed suddenly as he looked across the beds. They'd always been ahead of him whatever he did. Many a time he and the Winds gardener had raced for the first strawberries and he had been beaten. There weren't better strawberry beds in the county, he said.

They had saved the strawberry beds and a patch for vegetables, but the old gardener who had replaced the young one gone to the War, could not do more. So they had had to let the flowers go and the border was a tangle of Michaelmas daisies and Golden Rod running into each other and all choked with weeds.

They had lost a lot of apples, too, Cynthia said. She knelt on a gardening mat and dug at a particularly obstinate weed with her fork. They came in the evening and in the early morning and she could not condemn the raiders she thought, remembering apple gathering expeditions and the orchards with the pale autumn morning sunlight on the yellow leaves and the mists at night. And how good a stolen apple had tasted. There hadn't been many to pick this year and store in the apple loft above the stables. She jabbed at the weed and in memory stood in the doorway of the apple loft, pushing back the creaking door and smelling the sweet, musty smell of apples. It was all dim and full of spiders' webs and spiders, and how strong the apples had smelt, and when you opened the door you broke a cobweb and it fell across your face. She pushed away a strand of hair, and it felt like a cobweb.

'You'll never get it up with that, Miss,' Burns said, and she felt suddenly shy, an inefficient child playing at gardening before Burns, the expert. He stooped with his hands on his knees, his old, immensely lined face absorbed. 'It's a stubborn thing once it gets a root. The garden will be choked with it, Miss.'

'It's choked already, I'm afraid.' She stood up, feeling disheartened. She had forgotten, with her face to the earth, breaking it up as she weeded, smelling it. The smell of autumn earth was almost as sweet as the smell of apples. She had pulled and dug and a colour had come to her cheeks and her hair was all about her face and she was dirty and hot and tired, but she had been peaceful, struggling with the weeds and thinking of her childhood. There would be time to plant some bulbs even if when the spring came they had to struggle up through weeds. But the War might be over in the spring.

Mary finding her there, wished that she were a gardener. She must become a gardener one day. But she had always lived in London. And she looked at Cynthia across the little space of garden path that lay between them and felt ashamed because she had always been a Londoner.

'There isn't much time now,' Cynthia said, and wiped her hand on her skirt and twisted back the strands of her hair leaving some clay on it. 'After the War . . . there will be such a lot to be done. It's a lovely garden, Mary,' and she gave Mary the garden and Winds saying that. She would have the garden at Heystead to comfort her. 'A kind garden,' old Burns murmured, absorbed in the bed newly dug for vegetables and the strawberry beds which had always beaten his. He stood sideways, looking up at the sky between a line of tall trees outside the wall. The sky was the faint soft blue of October, the leaves yellow and wet against it. One or two white feathery clouds moved slowly towards the sun. A kind garden, he said. Warm and sunny. It didn't hold the cold and damp like the garden at

Avening. He had told the Colonel he ought to be cutting some ticees, but he didn't seem to remember. Maybe Master John would remind him. Master John wouldn't ever be able to fight again. But he could get round the garden on his crutches now. And it seemed only yesterday, Burns said, watching the sky and the wet leaves against it (there'd be more rain and they weren't ready for it yet in the garden), that he was stealing the peaches when his, Burns', back was turned.

They left him in the garden, absorbed in it, but with the selfishness of a gardener only as far as it affected his own garden. There were some cuttings he'd like to take if Miss Cynthia would let him. They had been freemasons in the society of gardeners too long to make an answer necessary. And if Miss Cynthia would like some of his dahlias. He had done wonders with them this year. Even Master John had noticed them. Vaguely his face showed the fumbling relief that Master John had noticed them. For Master John, since he came back from the War didn't notice many things

These were polite compliments, such as one mother makes to another about her children, each only being interested in her own Burns, left in the garden at Winds, went through it, pulled a weed here and there, felt a leaf, took out his penknife to cut a stem, slit it open to examine it. At the strawberry beds he stood, his old face absorbed, his dim blue eyes searching the earth for its secret.

Cynthia said she must wash her hands before tea, and she pushed her hair back again, and left a piece of earth on her face. She and Mary were rather shy with each other because in any circumstances it is difficult for sisters-in-law to be friends, and now that the first shock was over they had slipped back into embarrassment. Mary thought that Cynthia belonged to Winds and felt that she had no place there now, and when she said, 'You've got earth on your hair and on your face, and the funny thing is it suits you,' Cynthia smiled at her, that curious little smile which

Godfrey had too and David and Stella. It made them all alike at times although without it they would have been so different. When they smiled like that, they looked down, as though they hid a secret. Mary thought they hid their love for Winds and for each other, and some premonition of death and life coming inevitably to break the thing made by their love, of which they never spoke. They had all the reticence of their race and class, so they could not speak of it even now. They could only look at each other with that difficult smile and hide at once behind the shadow all that it meant to them and how much they had lost.

David never spoke to Cynthia of his own personal loss when Godfrey was killed. But she knew, putting aside her own grief to pity David. After all, she thought and thanked a God Who dropped small mercies into gigantic calamities which made the small mercies unimportant to all but the recipients, she had Francis.

Once Mary spoke to her of their childhood, standing in the old nursery which the curiously shaped window left dim even early of an autumn afternoon. That childhood, Godfrey and Cynthia had shared, and now that Godfrey was dead it seemed a world she could not enter. Cynthia said it had been perfect, her voice coming slowly in the room where there was no other sound except the dim humming of the bees in the gable, growing sleepy with autumn. Perfect . . . she sighed over the word, looking at the absurd screen with the faces of Bluebeard and Red Riding-hood and at the window which she had seen when she had come awake in the morning sleeping beside Nanny. Because it had been childhood, she thought, and nothing could ever take its place or be the same after. Mary watching her, saw Godfrey for a moment and Cynthia looking for Godfrey and finding him and sharing that childhood with him. Then she thought, as Cynthia moved towards the window and stood with the light on her face, there was no likeness at all really. And she was relieved as though

Godfrey was given back to her. But she felt some sudden sympathy for Francis who had stood in the doorway looking at Cynthia, stooping under his love for her. For a moment she wondered if Francis would always stand in the doorway shut out as she was from those secrets which they could not share because they had not been children at Winds and a perfect childhood must shut out everyone outside it because nothing could ever be quite the same after. She and Francis were only strangers who had wandered in through the open gate by some accident, with no security here.

Perhaps that was why she went away from Winds back to her own small house in London and her hospital work soon after Godfrey was killed and from Michael, leaving him to Nanny. Someone must stay at Winds and she talked to Cynthia about it, half excusing, half explaining. Cynthia said, but of course, she understood, with a little emphasis, to show how completely she understood. Winds for Mary must hold only memories of Godfrey because for her it had held nothing else but Godfrey. For Cynthia it held so many other things, this nursery and Nanny sewing by the fire and the bees humming, and the garden full of chrysanthemums which she had always loved as a child, seeing them in the austere exquisite tidiness of the autumn garden as it had been before the War. And the smell of earth in autumn and the hot strawberry beds in summer, and the apple orchards. It held too the stables and the smell and feeling of the stables in the early mornings or a winter afternoon and the sound of horses moving across the cobbles of the yard; and the lake across which she and David had tried to push a boat on his last leave when they had stuck in the weeds with which the lake was choked since no one had time to clear it. They had only done it for fun and they had laughed a lot, and she had been happy, hearing David laugh. She looked at Mary through a mist made by all these things and said she understood

completely. 'Someone has got to stay,' Mary said apologetically because she was escaping. Away from Winds she would be less sure that Godfrey was dead and all life over. Even Michael turning her own face to her, hardly comforted or reassured her. From her own face he looked out at her with Godfrey's eyes, hiding suddenly, playing a game which all the family played only with the family, shutting her outside too. 'You see there is the camp,' she said. 'We couldn't close the house on their account alone. It makes all the difference to them having Winds to come to. And then David will be coming on leave. And Michael of course is better here than in London, although I shall miss him terribly.' Cynthia agreed that David would be coming on leave. And she smelt the garden and the stables and pushed a boat through the weeds with David. And Mary stood desolately outside, envying her Mary too, would be coming at week-ends, Cynthia said. She mustn't work too hard. Godfrey had left her to them to take care of and they would look after Michael. She opened the door suddenly letting Mary in. (She had not known that it was closed.) Opening it she thought of Francis and forgot how she had pushed a boat through the reeds with David, and had come home from hunting with Godfrey and had heard the clock strike and had seen the yard in autumn dusk, and the stable door black in a grey wall, and had heard a horse's hoofs on cobblestones, slow, vague and unreal, half hidden in November mist. There had been no time to do any of these things with Francis. But one of these days she thought, she and Francis would do them together. And she went away and wrote a letter to Francis about the things they would do at Heystead when the War was over. Francis' sister was at Heystead now, running it as a hospital. So Cynthia could stay at Winds where she was needed. There was not in those letters which she and Francis wrote to each other every second day, any difficulty, any embarrassment such as must come inevitably

between two people face to face in immense intimacy who have known each other too short a time. Afterwards she was to look back in bewilderment at those letters which she had written so easily and put in the post to be carried by difficult routes through neutral territory to a German prison camp where a stranger lived who was her husband.

David came on leave at Christmas. There was still no sign of his going out. He was anxious about it, jumpy, wondering why they had left him so long. (Someone had perhaps seen him and thought he was even younger than he was.) Everyone who had been at Sandhurst with him was out now. He was left behind.

Someone had stopped him in the street in London 'I thought I knew your face.' David had stared at him not knowing his. Yet baffled because somewhere he had seen someone like him. 'Don't you remember?' They had been in the same house at school, but this boy had been older. He had been out already and wounded on the Somme he told David. You didn't live long on the Somme, he said.

Stella being patient with David in this new difficult mood (he had never been difficult before), knew that he felt left behind too. He said once that the War might be over before he got to it, and her heart lifted wildly at the thought. They had a lot of parties at Christmas for the officers of the camp, and some for the men too, and they played and sang songs and danced, but somehow the parties never quite got the spirit of those earlier parties, over which they had whispered at school when they went back. The most energetic people now were the older men. Majors and Colonels who were typical pre-war soldiers. They were always ready to dance and play games and they were troubled by the slackness of 'these young fellows' as they said. The younger officers, who were all very pale with tired eyes, didn't want to do anything very much except sit by the fire and listen to someone playing the piano or the gramophone. A tall, spectacled Yeomanry officer who had

been a schoolmaster in private life used to play by ear for hours as if he were alone in the room. He couldn't play anything anyone asked for, because he couldn't read a note, he said. They didn't ask him anyway. They all came in to tea, or in the evenings, apologising for muddy boots and though they didn't express any gratitude to Cynthia they were always glad to come. Captain Brown drifted to the piano and the others sat round the fire, smoking their pipes and not talking at all while he played for his own pleasure, snatches of things he had heard and liked and remembered. Their lives had been rather like his musical memory, snatches of life, never continuous but always broken. People they had liked but had lost before they had had time to make a friendship, places they had liked where they had been billeted, vague memories of spring and apple blossom or training in autumn country. They had lost them too before they had had time to do anything about it, as they had lost the friends they might have made. Sometimes they found a name scribbled on a note-book they had had when they were doing some course, and they stared at it, not remembering anything about the man who had written his name and his regiment there so that they might meet again. They sat smoking their pipes while Captain Brown played his broken music so symbolic of their lives, and they liked the firelight and the soft, rather inadequate lamplight which did not hurt their eyes, so easily hurt since the last gas attack. They hardly ever spoke (not like those earlier people Stella remembered who had talked and laughed all the time), and sometimes they fell asleep in the firelight as Captain Brown played. When they slept you could see what the War had done to them. But when they were awake they just lived for the moment, not trying to piece together those broken fragments and the present was good in the drawing-room at Winds with the firelight and the lamplight and Brown playing his music to drown any sound that might come in from outside.

When one of his subalterns fell asleep in the drawing-room after dinner, the Colonel was profusely apologetic, feeling that his regiment had been disgraced. Waking, the boy had looked at Cynthia and blinked his weak eyes and apologised, and it was the first time he had looked at her properly. He sat for a while with the heavy pallor of a man half asleep, staring into the fire, blinking at it. Then he stood up and shook hands and apologised again and went away. Colonel Campbell stayed behind to repeat his apologies. He was afraid that the truth was that many of these young fellows who were officers nowadays didn't know how to behave in a lady's drawing-room. And acknowledging that fact, he sighed for the home he had lost, the pre-war Army.

Cynthia begged him not to think of it. She had nursed tired men and knew all about them. She said quickly that she was very glad they should sleep and only wished that Mr. Evans had had a more comfortable resting place. And Colonel Campbell would let her know, wouldn't he, if there was anything more they could do. Colonel Campbell, relieved, looked at her as few of the young fellows had looked at her. He had noticed that too. It had made him more than anything else wonder what they were coming to. A lovely girl, he thought. And remembering that her husband was a prisoner, and that he'd heard they had only been married for a few weeks, he felt sorry for that poor fellow in his prison camp.

'They're all crocks,' he said, grateful to her. He spoke sympathetically enough. His own son had been killed on the Somme. He had looked to Geoffrey to continue the tradition in the regiment when the Army should be what it had been again. 'Six months' men you know. Been out too long. I doubt they'll get their six months the way things are going.'

Stella heard him and broke in. The Americans. Hordes of them were coming, weren't they, pouring into France? She counted on them, all the millions of them, to save one

British subaltern. . . . David. Surely it was not too much to hope.

Margery wrote to her these days. She was *sure* now (But the Major of thirty-five had been superseded long ago.) The suspense was awful. Stella had no sympathy to give Margery, waiting in breathless suspense for David's orders which might come any day. Margery could replace her subaltern as she had replaced the Major. You couldn't get another brother, she thought simply, not defining the other things never to be replaced, the childhood she and David had shared, all the things they had done together.

Colonel Campbell didn't think much of the Americans. They had been long enough in coming and now they'd have to teach them how to fight.

'But they must make a difference,' Cynthia said, pleading as Stella had pleaded, for David—all those millions to save David. If the War ended soon he might never go out at all. 'All those fresh young men.' She saw a boy asleep on the sofa, the lamplight on his pretty exhausted face; a boy who had been too tired to look at her. 'Fresh to it,' she said again. 'Untired.'

'We're terribly short of men,' Colonel Campbell agreed, his face suddenly haggard. 'If we hadn't got them coming, I don't know what we'd do. They'll finish the War all right, but I don't know when. As you say, they're fit and fresh. I saw some of them. My God,' he forgot himself sufficiently to show emotion. 'They looked fit.' He had almost said 'after our fellows,' and he too saw the boy's pale face against the chintz cushion, his mouth open as he slept. He couldn't say it, but the spirit had all gone to pieces the last few months. He thought of Geoffrey who had come to represent to him what youth ought to be, what the Army would be one of these days again when there was no War to make an Army what it should not be. He had not seen Geoffrey dying, nor held him as a child of his own age had held him, while he coughed and died.

David couldn't see what he was being kept back for when some of these six-months people were already being pushed out after only a month or two at home. He had had a far longer and better training than most people, having gone to Sandhurst so young. He had done course after course, bombing, Lewis gun, musketry and had emerged from this last with a first-class certificate. He had learned all that could be taught without actual practice, of the spirit of the bayonet, beginning with his early days when an officer who toured England lecturing on the subject had lectured to them. He had been a fat, comfortable, cheerful person, making jokes as he made them at all his lectures—the same jokes. He told them to avoid bayoneting a man between the ribs and in the shoulders, as in these cases it was almost impossible to pull the bayonet out again. But if by accident you should find that you had got a man on your bayonet through the shoulders or in the ribs (and that might well happen in the heat of an attack) the only way to get him off was to put a charge in and fire. The recoil would do the rest. He told them that he had met one of his pupils to whom he had lectured in this very room, on leave from France after the Somme. He had bayoneted a man in an attack, as he jumped into a German trench, right through the shoulder and couldn't get him off. 'I remembered what you told me, Sir,' he said. 'And put in a charge and blew him down the dugout.'

They all laughed dutifully and resolved to remember too, and day after day they had lectures of this kind. There was a story of a pale-faced cadet rising at question time after one of the bayonet lectures.

'Well, what can I do for you?'

'Please, sir, can you tell me how to join the A.S.C.?'

This man went from camp to camp, from training school to training school, lecturing to schoolboys, or to middle-aged ex-civilians, carrying his torch 'The Spirit of the Bayonet.' But though much could be learned in lectures

and in practice on sacks stuffed with straw and much with regard to the Spirit, as the Army Manual said, '*could be accomplished in billets on wet days*,' the real thing could only be learned by practice, and a stuffed sack didn't move as living men did. But David felt he had learned all he could learn at home and nearly everyone he knew was out there now and he felt shy among these people so near his own age who had already experienced everything (and slept to forget it, only to dream of it), cut off, alike, from schoolboys younger than himself and men a little older who had been to France. They had nothing to say to each other, no common experience to share because he had not been out. He felt that vaguely. He did not know that their loneliness was greater than his, because they could never be again what they had been. At this time he had only one thought, and he might have comforted Colonel Campbell for the young fellows gone to pieces. He was still full of enthusiasm, but he had no right to speak of anything because he had not been to France. So he sat silent and lonely, and Stella tried to reach him and failed for the first time.

His mind which she could not reach was the confused yet clear mind of his generation. He accepted all the things he knew as things he had always known. He knew all about the horrors of war even if he had not been to France. It must have occurred to him as to others listening to a lecture on bombing or on the Spirit of the Bayonet that the same lectures were being given in Germany. He was not shocked by these things because he was used to them and the instinct of self-preservation covered many horrors in war. When he went to France first, just after his nineteenth birthday, he had never seen a dead man. Then he saw a great many dead men and the sight was not a pretty one after an attack, No Man's Land full of dead men was infinitely safer and preferable to No Man's Land full of living men. That was all. It was war of which civilians knew nothing. But he belonged to the War and the War to

him. It was inevitable and since it was there, one must get to it as soon as possible. Like most people of his generation he was not troubled about right or wrong. Time, being so long in boyhood, it seemed as if it had always been. If he had been twenty-eight or thirty the bayonet practice might have shocked him as it would have shocked a civilian. He was only nineteen and he accepted it then whatever he might have felt after.

After the twenty-first of March of course, they began to push everyone out, even Colonel Campbell's crooks who hadn't had their six months at home and lots of new ones who hadn't had anything like it. Stella was at school then, but came home very soon after so it must have been an early Easter that year. Afterwards when March the 21st had become a landmark on that road of her childhood, a name of terrible significance like the Somme and Passchendaele and many others, she looked in the diary which she had begun to keep. It was incredible that she could have been doing ordinary things and should not have known. 'Letters. Maurice, David,' she read. She prided herself on the brief, businesslike construction of her diary. Margery sat up at night writing reams and naturally after such indiscretions had to keep her diary locked up. There was nothing in Stella's to interest anyone who found it. Letters from Maurice and David. Wrote David (first—two days later there was the entry: Wrote Maurice). Played against St. Mary's in the afternoon. She remembered then what a wonderful day it had been. The weather was always on the Germans' side. The entry went on We won: 4—1. So there had been no time that day to do more than write to David. For the St. Mary's team had come back to tea of course. Thank Heaven that meant something to eat for tea, and jam—even plum jam which civilians were glad to get. Before tea she had taken the Left Wing of the visiting team to her room to wash and do her hair. The Left Wing washing her hands had let her eyes wander round the room.

Brushing her hair she looked at the photographs on the dressing-table which she had first seen from the washstand. 'Your brother?'

'No, Brigid's.' She and Brigid shared a room now. She said rather hastily—Brigid might come in at any moment bringing the visiting Half Back or Goal Keeper to wash her hands. 'He was killed on the Somme.' She wondered that it was necessary to say that, for photographs of people who had been killed seemed to take on a curious melancholy, and the face of Brigid's brother looked out at them as they tidied their hair, heavy with it, as though he had known already the full significance the photograph was to have.

'Oh.' The Left Wing twisted her hair into a plait. 'I have got a friend out there,' she said complacently. 'A lieutenant friend.' She turned sideways to see her bow. The girls at St. Mary's were 'not quite,' according to the standards of Maythorpe. Her eyes went on to David. 'We're not allowed to put photographs up,' she said. 'I call it a shame. And they look at our letters; except our home ones. So I have to get him to write home.' She turned to David again. 'Your brother. He's like you.'

'Yes.' Stella swept her from the room coldly. She hated her. If they had been playing, how joyfully she would have got the ball from the St. Mary's Left Wing, dodging and sweeping it away, leaving the opposing Left Wing gasping after her. She would have had unnatural skill and speed to do it. She felt breathless as though she had been running. 'Is your brother out too?' she asked in the corridor full of the grey cold light of the March afternoon, that had followed the morning of strange beauty. There had been no need to ask the question.

'No, he's too young.'

The width and length of the cold corridor (what a beastly month March was, although it had been so lovely earlier to-day) yawned between them, a river they could never

cross. They went downstairs with the river between them to the dining-room where in honour of the visitors there was damson jam for tea.

That, Stella remembered afterwards, was how she had spent the afternoon of the twenty-first of March. She had not known what was happening in France or how early the day had begun with the German movement of infiltration, which translated, meant coming up through the valleys, through the ghosts of woods and apple orchards under cover of the morning mist.

Chapter 17

ON A GRAY spring afternoon Cynthia found a small boy sheltering behind an enormous bicycle on the avenue. He had come under cover of the trees, until they fell back leaving the road to go on alone between the fields to the house. The small boy and the bicycle were off the road hiding behind the last tree. From this comparative security he peered fearfully at the house. He saw Cynthia before Cynthia saw him. His voice came from behind the tree, suddenly strong because of the comfort of another human presence.

'Would you be Miss Seymour?'

'Yes.' Her heart gave that wild leap of terror and fell again. There was nothing, nothing yet that could come by telegram. Francis, she thought gabbling silent reassurances to herself. But Francis was safe although a prisoner. And Godfrey was dead. Never again could any terror come to them about Godfrey. A blackbird sang with sudden joy in one of the last of the trees above her head. It was cold, it was grey, everything lying quiet under the still cold greyness of March but spring had come. He shouted the news and waited for an answer: shouted it again since no answer came.

'I am afraid of my life of the dogs,' the boy said, his voice small and quiet again, almost a whisper, recapturing his fear.

'You needn't be.' She looked at him as she took the telegram. He was a stranger in the village where she knew everyone, the postmistress' nephew, she thought probably. She had said that one of her sister's children was coming to stay with her. The bicycle was too big for him. She opened the telegram while above her the blackbird waited, his shining head on one side, gathering strength for another

long intoxicated shout that spring had come. David, she thought. Of course But her fingers were clumsy. They might have been put out of place as her heart might have been, from constant fear. The small boy beside her, stooped, peering through the bars of the bicycle towards the house. He murmured while she read. He didn't see the dogs now, but a pack of them, there had been. They had all run out at him the last time. He was terrified of dogs and of the dark and of long tree-hung avenues up which he bicycled in terror on the bicycle much too big for him. It had belonged to Aunt Emily's son Jim who had once delivered telegrams but was now a soldier. When Cynthia said that there was no answer, he swung his small body with amazing agility on to the pedals (he could not reach the seat), and disappeared among the trees.

Cynthia and the blackbird were left alone with it; with David's telegram and the cold March afternoon and the water rippling a little and the pine trees at the edge stirring in a faint east wind. She stood on the bridge across the channel where the lake became a slow-moving river the other side and where they used to bathe before the reeds choked it, and leaned her arm on the low stone wall. The blackbird came with her a little way, shouted his song, drunk with it, and flew through the orchard to the garden

Everything was grey, the low stone wall on which she leant, the field which had been green a little while ago, the house where they had not yet lit the lamps, the lake water against which the islands covered with rhododendrons were like black-sailed ships. They sailed away from her, a little fleet of ships into the darkness made by the pine trees beyond the lake. Between the islands and the shore there were dark mysterious rivers fascinating to explore; but you couldn't get a boat through them now because of the weeds. The reeds growing at the edge of the lake were a relief, yellow against the grey; and the scarlet willows beside the bridge. If she looked closer she could see the formation of

buds, but it was a late, cold spring and no leaf showed yet. Presently she thought, there would be yellow irises down there by the lake, growing beside the path which in their childhood had led to fairyland, through dark laurels and rhododendrons half covering it and out again into the sunlight. Beyond the pine wood the path led at last to open marsh country strangely sunlit in contrast with the darkness left behind. Cattle came down from the higher slopes in hot weather to stand knee deep in the swamp, swishing the flies off with their tails. It was fun to creep through the darkness of the laurels and the rhododendrons and the pines on a September evening and come to the gate at the end of the path, and look into a world bathed in that drenching yellow sunlight.

A thrush sang somewhere near, less joyfully than the blackbird. The fields behind her were growing greyer, the avenue becoming a pale ghostly path as the light faded.

Stella found her there, coming with a pack of dogs at her heels, their own dogs and Francis' dogs whose memories of another life were now less clear than they had been. They all went hunting in the marsh beside the lake, yapping ecstatically as though it were new undiscovered country.

Stella shouted at them and whistled. Sam, the retriever, too. She didn't know what Francis would say. Sam wouldn't be much good for shooting any more.

'Sam may be ruined beyond recover,' Cynthia agreed, leaning on the low stone wall, her face on her hands (Her face now was grey, too.) 'Francis will have to give him to me and start training another, that's all.' She heard below her the sound of a retriever swimming through the coarse grass at the edge of the water, so different from the leaping movement with which the terriers broke through. A water bird flew across the grey mirror of the lake, disturbing it, its wings black against it, and disappeared into the darkness of one of the islands. Sam stood shoulder deep in swamp, quivering and watched it go. Stella took

the telegram from Cynthia's hand as soon as she saw it

'David.' Had she said it, or was it the lake water disturbed by a bird and rippling to the shore? The water lifted itself against the yellow reeds and fell back. The pines sighed a little in a sudden wind which came and passed. An east wind. Stella's face was cold in it.

She said, 'I wish it wasn't France.'

There was nothing else they could say, no comfort they could give each other. 'Damn those dogs.' Stella shouted at them in a sudden intolerable irritation. She cursed them, using words she had learnt from David. They did not seem to come incongruously from her mouth.

They went back to the house, their faces cold in the east wind which might blow gas across in France. But it didn't make much difference now, Stella thought, because they had given up using cloud gas David had told her and used shell gas, which was heavier than air and hung in wooded places or where there were standing crops, and crept into holes in the ground, or dug-outs. A light showed yellow in one of the windows of the house. David's room. That was Nanny going in with a candle and going out again. The window was cold once more, the grey wall of the house darkly shadowed by the ivy and the trees. Stella wished that David had been coming to-night, even arriving in the middle of the night as Godfrey had come for his last leave. They could have given him all the things he loved, a fire in his room so that when he awoke—if he awoke—he would see it flickering on the ceiling. And tea in bed in the morning. And Stella could have left her door open secretly so that she could hear him breathing and know he was there. People breathed so loudly and steadily when they were asleep. And Nanny would have had something to do in David's room again to comfort her.

But it was better really, she knew, to meet David in London as they were going to; and they must pack some clothes, and it would be rather exciting she thought, to

stay in a London hotel in wartime London. And they might have an air raid, relieving her of that appalling burden of safety. But not while David was there, she thought, in the hall, where it was getting dark. She went to remind someone about the lamps, going down the stairs and along the stone corridor to the kitchen. She stood in the doorway as she had stood that other morning with David, but David wasn't there now. Only Mrs. Bates bending over the fire. And the fire was on all the white walls, making them rose colour. She thought, standing in the doorway with the cold darkness of the passage behind her, that the kitchen was the only room that looked quite the same, and it would always be the same whatever happened. She went in and stood by the fire warming herself, and asked Mrs. Bates for the hall lamp. She would take it up because Nellie the housemaid had so much to do. And she did not tell Mrs. Bates that David had got his orders or that she and Cynthia were going up to London tomorrow.

Cynthia was telling Nanny, upstairs in the nursery where one or two of the dogs had followed her, oppressed with a sense of guilt, creeping under it to the hearth to lie down in the firelight, but their eyes, sleepless, turned to Cynthia and Nanny who had forgotten them. Nanny liked dogs in their places, she said, which was not by the nursery fire. They laid their heads on their paws as though the short hunt had exhausted them, and quivered a little and breathed quickly, still hunting in imagination, but they could not sleep because they must keep their eyes open, watching Cynthia and Nanny.

But presently, being sure of Cynthia and Nanny, the black retriever turned on his wet side and stared into the fire, dreaming of Francis. His eyes, reflecting the fire, saw stubble fields or fields of turnips and Francis' legs above the turnip leaves. He waited quivering, for a sound, but he heard nothing, not even the little rattle as the fire fell in.

His hearing wasn't as good as it had been, but since no one had had time to take him shooting, that fact had not been discovered. He lay, with his face on his large black paws showing the strain of his listening, and his eyes wide open, dreaming of Francis.

When Cynthia went out of the room he got up and followed her, walking carefully because he knew he had no right to be there; and all his care could not prevent his wet paws marking Nanny's clean floor. He followed Cynthia, the nearest thing to security he had. As long as he kept near Cynthia, some time Francis would come back to him, and they would go shooting again. Sam sighed, lying in Cynthia's room watching her pack, dreaming of stubble fields and turnip fields in which he and Francis had gone shooting partridges before the War.

Cynthia and Stella and David spent his leave together in a crowded hotel where people came and went all day, and the corridors and hall were always full of soldier's luggage and everything smelt and felt of the War. David's leave was vague, indefinite. When they read the casualty lists they all knew that the orders could not be long delayed. Everybody was going out, half-healed wounded men, men who had only just come home under the scheme of giving tired men six months' leave, young men, old men. The hotel was full of them, and of very young officers going out like David for the first time.

He met some he had known at Sandhurst, and at Aldershot later, and when they went out before he did, he seemed to Stella to look after them as though he felt left behind. People he knew were always ringing him up on the telephone and sometimes Stella answered it.

'He's not in. It's his sister speaking.'

'I know you already.' Interest showed in the voice down the wire. 'By your photograph and from David. It's Guy Loring speaking.'

'I've heard of you too.'

'What have you heard?'

They had a flirtation down the telephone which cheered her a little. She would have something to write to Margery who was doing parlourmaid at an officer's convalescent hospital now and had written that it was too thrilling

'I'm going out with David,' he said at the end.

'Yes.' She thought despairingly: 'My God. I wish I were.'

'Don't worry too much,' he said sympathetically. 'I'll look after David, I promise you.'

He came into dinner that night. He was a year older than David and had been to France before and been wounded and was going back.

He treated David as though he were years older. They both, Stella thought, were really only absorbed in their going, in what was happening out there. So and So had been hit, and So and So had been killed. And Guy Loring had met Bradford to-day. He was going out again too. He was married and had a baby. Guy Loring had gone with him to buy Glaxo for the baby. He laughed and David laughed. David was always laughing. He was tremendously excited, pleased with the friendship of older men who made much of him.

Everybody petted him in the hotel because he looked so young. Well, he got something out of it, Stella thought. She knew, because she knew him so well, that he was longing to be there, impatient for his orders to come. She didn't blame him. When he read the papers and the names of so many men he knew in the casualty list at breakfast she watched his face. She knew how much he was affected by the fact that it was his generation now, someone who had been at school with him, or at Sandhurst later, not someone older, Godfrey's friend, as it had been earlier.

You couldn't do much with leave under such circumstances. They didn't do much with it, she thought afterwards. They had become suddenly shy of each other, rather

polite, each respecting the other's secret. She knew for the first time that the War had taken him from her. Only his body was here now, all his thoughts and mind in France with those dead men, or with those others still living. She couldn't hold him against them. She went shopping with him, comforting herself as Nanny had comforted herself, with David's clothes. They chose shirts and underclothes together and the people serving them were sympathetic. They were both children forced into playing at being grown up, but she looked older than he did, partly because she had been underfed in those years. She was older, too. Leaving David with two or three other men in the lounge downstairs she went up in the lift alone after one of these shopping expeditions. A woman wearing black spoke to her.

'Has your brother come back on leave?'

'He's going out.'

'Where?'

'France.' She turned away from the woman's eyes. She knew that the casualties were one in three at this time.

She helped him to pack the last night when his orders had come (that waiting had ended and a new waiting would begin). The hotel bedroom where they did it, stamped itself on her memory so that years later she could see the small rose pattern of the wall paper. It was better than sitting downstairs in the lounge full of people, wondering what to talk about. But David had so little to pack, and presently it would be finished and then there would be nothing to do or say. But he would enjoy it, she thought, lots of things, going with all those others, the excitement, the friendship. She buoyed herself up thinking how he would enjoy it. What did it matter what they suffered at home waiting? And she might, now that she had been allowed to leave school much earlier than she would have left it ordinarily, be allowed to go and do something.

And David would get lots of fun out of it. She was almost happy thinking of the fun he would get and went down suddenly like a pricked bubble as though she had had a thought made beautiful and wonderful by accompanying music and the music stopping had left it bare and cold.

Cynthia came upstairs with them and said good-night in the unfamiliar hotel room, standing under the unshaded electric lamp with the light on her face. That was better than the lake at Winds on a cold spring evening with the shadows moving a little, at which Cynthia had looked, holding David's telegram in her hand, as though she saw it for the last time.

Stella avoided her eyes. They could not look at each other across David. But turning away from Cynthia she saw them all reflected in the mirror and discovered for the first time that they were all alike, as though this moment had made the faint elusive family likeness plain once before it vanished for ever.

Cynthia said, 'Good-night, David darling,' and Stella stood outside for a moment watching them. David turned quickly. 'Good-night, Cynthie,' and they smiled at each other. The smile like a dark shadow lay over Cynthia's face and over David's too. But it hid nothing now. They could hide nothing in this room where the glaring, unshaded light was over everything, leaving no shadows anywhere except that shadow on Cynthia's face and on David's which seemed to hold all that this parting meant to them. Nothing, as Cynthia had said to Mary, could ever push out the life of childhood, nor could anything be the same after, as nothing that could have happened afterwards in life could have altered their love for each other. If they had gone away, been separated for a long time and met again as strangers with no common interest it would only be as though someone most beloved had died, and death does not alter love. They might in time have groped back finding a way, one taking the other's

hand to lead him. 'Do you remember?' until the years between were forgotten and the stranger wore suddenly a familiar face and they knew that he had not died after all.

Cynthia not defining these things, held David and with him Godfrey who was dead and Francis a prisoner, all wearing the same clothes, having the same smell. Their clothes had been stained with rain and mud and had dried again and they smelt of leather and tobacco and rain. She felt the rain against her face when she had kissed David. She never knew whether he or she had cried.

He went with her to her room, leaving Stella sitting on the bed alone among his clothes, her hands in her lap. In the corridor where the lights were dim, he touched his sister's arm.

'Don't worry too much, Cynthie.' He could call her that out here. 'And you've got Francis. I'm so glad,' he said earnestly, 'that you've got Francis. He's a splendid fellow.'

She felt proud of David's approval and could have wept. They walked together down the corridor in silence. They both thought, looking back, of their childhood at Winds: 'It's been perfect.' But they could not speak of it, nor speak easily to each other. The reticence of brother and sister, a wall not to be broken down, left them helpless. She could only say, 'You'll write often.'

'Of course.'

She knew that he would. David always did.

'And to Stella.' She was sorry for Stella. After all, she had Francis.

'Yes.'

She kissed him quickly, shyly, feeling like his mother. And for a moment the barrier was broken down and he turned to her as to his mother, as men turn only to their mothers. They had hardly known theirs. He whispered, 'Cynthie. Don't worry. It'll be all right,' holding her with

his strong young arms, a child wearing a man's clothes. She moved her hand over his shoulders feeling them. David hadn't grown into his shoulders yet. He comforted her and she felt comforted as a mother might have been by this child of hers, who needed the comfort she could give him.

Then they stood apart, brother and sister, shy and awkward, not knowing what to say. She whispered good-night and sent him back to Stella, and watched him going down the long hotel corridor between the white walls, his figure in uniform seeming to fill the space between them until he turned at the end and was out of her sight. Perhaps he and Stella would talk, she thought, understanding each other, as they had talked in the nursery across Nanny in the early morning when they were children.

But it was less easy to talk over a packed kit-bag which was an unwieldy, untidy thing to move, having the senseless weight of a dead body. When the packing was done and all the room smelt of it, Stella went and opened the window. The night was cold with an east wind blowing. She stood with her face to it, feeling frozen. In a minute she would turn back and laugh again because David laughed. She must not fail or she would lose him. She leaned out into the darkness hiding in it. The air smelt of fog and petrol and smoke. London wasn't asleep; it never slept now. How could anyone sleep? An ambulance drove through the dark street below the window, its quietness seeming stealthy as though the burden it carried was not safe yet. It rang its bell as it reached the corner, but softly, still with that suggestion of stealth. War-wounded men she thought. They came at night and Aunt Nancy and lots of other people were up all night receiving them. She heard trains rattling and shunting—trains which had brought men back from France and were getting ready to take other men on the way there to-morrow morning. She swung round quickly and faced the light again.

'That's all, I suppose,' she said, because she couldn't think of anything else to say.

David said that was all, because he too couldn't think of anything else to say. The relationship of brother and sister left them only pain and the room was full of it. They had nothing to say, no careful, slow, last talk for the one staying behind, or easy talk which did not matter between two people going together, free because of that, leaving nothing after them to show what they had been.

Hubert Creagh had talked to Philip before he went out and Philip had talked to Guy. And George had talked, slow difficult talk to Irene. Husband and wife, lovers, friends, talked before they parted. But these two were only brother and sister and the closeness of their relationship lay on them like a weight. And David was too young to have anything to leave.

She said, forcing her tongue to move: 'Perhaps it won't last much longer now.' (It had lasted for ever.)

He answered, perhaps not, but with no conviction. He had heard tales of the 21st of March, soldiers' truthful tales which had not reached the newspapers. They had leaked through somehow, men talking in hospitals perhaps as they came awake after a long nightmare, talking with difficulty, as gassed men talked.

And he'd write often, she said.

Often.

He loved her and he wanted to comfort her and he was going away and looking forward to his going. Since it was there and the others were in it he must get to them as soon as possible. And he fretted imagining this and that possibility that might delay him. But seeing her small frozen face, he thought of their childhood together and how he had wanted her when he first went to school and had written unashamed: 'I see your dear little face.' He took from his pocket the cheque-book which was a new and treasured possession, and he said, you didn't spend

anything to speak of out there, lacking for nothing, and he'd been economical anyhow and he'd like her to buy something she wanted. He knew pocket money had been scarce. And he wrote a cheque proudly and was unable to conceal his pride giving it to her to comfort her.

She held it in her hand and cried a little. It was so cold between her fingers. And could David really spare it? She didn't want it. (She only wanted David.) David had always been so generous. She stared at the signature, 'David Mannering,' in the writing growing dry as she watched it.

'You must always let me know if you want money,' he said, putting the cheque-book away.

She was less fit physically than he was, because she had been underfed for the last three years. And she was overgrown so that she was taller than David but much thinner. She felt weak, inclined to cry over David and his cheque-book, and terrified of crying. She must say good-night and leave him, but she found it hard to cross the room which swam a little before her. The long strain and underfeeding had left her unfit for this. She had had neuralgia the whole of last term at school, but she had not spoken of it. Now her head throbbed and ached and the light danced over David's head.

'Are they sure to call me?' he asked

'Cynthia has an alarm clock anyway. She'll wake you.'

'At six o'clock then,' he yawned. He was sleepy. She said good-night to him and they kissed each other as they had kissed when he went back to school and she went to bed and slept.

As her body became more exhausted, physical comfort came to be an anaesthetic, dulling pain. In the early morning between six and seven she asked him for something she had tried to ask for last night, and embarrassed and half ashamed, cut a piece of his hair where the sun had bleached it paler than the rest, thinking it was strange that he should be so fair when all the rest of them were dark.

Guy Loring spoke to her at the station 'We'll look after David. I'll look after him.' He smiled at her, looking so young and splendid in his uniform that for a moment she really believed he could look after David, that he could stand somehow between David and all the dangers of war. He went on, 'There'll be any number of old soldiers out there who'll take care of him, be watching him all the time. They're like that. The men are wonderful. And David's such a kid, you see,' he finished from his seniority of one year.

Cynthia was saying seriously to David, 'You won't run any unnecessary risks, do anything foolish,' and she spoke of Godfrey and of Michael who must grow up fatherless. While doing his duty in every way, she said, he would be as careful as it was possible to be. The whistle blew, drowning his answer. He was saying yes, of course he would be as careful as possible. He couldn't give her any further reassurance not knowing how careful it would be possible to be. With the blowing of the whistle there was a scurry. Distracted officers in charge of drafts were trying to collect men from the buffet and from the arms of their sweethearts and wives. David leaned out of the window laughing, 'Glad I haven't got a draft to look after.'

He was bareheaded and a ray of cold April sunlight coming through the glass roof of the platform was on his face and on his hair. Guy Loring leaned out beside him and the sunlight caught him too. They both looked rather beautiful. Then the train moved slowly as if the burden it carried was heavier than any it had been built for. The sunlight fell on the platform and David's face going away looked cold. They saw nothing else but David's face growing smaller and going away from them.

Chapter 18

NANCY CREAGH came with Guy to Winds where the spring was lovelier than anyone ever remembered it. Guy had been gassed on the 21st of March and she had said to him as he lay in hospital in London, ‘They say you will be discharged soon. Where would you like to go? Cynthia suggested Winds’ And she looked at him and longed for Cappagh hopelessly, as something too far away for her ever to reach or recover.

Guy did not think of Cappagh which seemed so far away to him too. If he thought of it and of his childhood there, it was as of something belonging to someone else, seeing it clearly as another person’s story and possession—more clearly perhaps than if he had understood that it belonged to him, since it is true that lookers-on see most of the game. He lay in bed, looking so well that his mother’s heart leapt in thanksgiving for the mercy that had taken Philip and Hubert from her (Hubert had been killed in the summer of ’17), but had spared Guy. And the doctor, a gloomy man, seemed to resent her happiness, for he told her that Guy was a bad case, a man who had been badly gassed. And it would be a long business.

‘They can’t send him out again then,’ she said ‘Not for a long time,’ he agreed, almost as if he wished he could send Guy out at once.

She stood at the end of Guy’s bed, asking him what he would like to do. She had brought in an armful of white narcissi and a kind young nurse had arranged them for her in a glass beside Guy’s bed. They filled the narrow little room with their scent, but he could not smell them. He hadn’t been able to smell anything since the night before the Germans came over; so that if he was never to recapture that sense, never to smell anything again, he must carry

with him always the last thing he had smelt which had been a confused smell of the earth walls of the dug-out and the whisky someone was drinking, and the smell of human bodies and mud and sweat-soaked clothes. He put out his hand and touched the petals of the narcissi which he could not smell. His mother, coming in, had left the door a little open, an old habit of hers which had never worried him before, but which worried him now. The white curtains at the window stirred in the draught and that worried him too. She saw the look in his face, but did not know what had caused it, thinking only of that gas attack and all they would do to make him well and make him forget. But he seemed tired and she left him when they had settled that they should go to Winds where the spring was lovely, Cynthia said. And they could stay as long as they liked and do what they liked. He looked tired when she went away, sacrificing herself for her love. Only a mother's love, she thought, would have discovered that he was tired, or have made it possible to go. But when she had gone, Irene Marsham came, bringing roses and said she would only stay a minute, and he lifted himself on his pillow to tell her to stay and talk and that he was quite all right and she mustn't go. She put her roses down beside the narcissi, and he was spoilt, she said, having flowers already, and he put out his hand and touched them as he had touched the narcissi.

'I can't smell,' he said.

'But you will be able to.' She did not rush at it, reassuring him and herself as Nancy Creagh had done. It might have been a statement or a question. They were far enough away from each other to be easy and they were both young and had learnt to talk with ease of the most terrible things, accepting them because they had known them when they were still young enough to adapt themselves. And she told him that George was home, and that he had been wounded pretty badly. But he was going to live, she said simply, in answer to the question in his face. If he had asked the

question in words or if the answer had been different, she would have answered it as simply, without embarrassment. But he had been terribly wounded; and it seemed as though she were almost joyous, exalted, over how terribly wounded George had been. Guy said that it had been a bad show reminding her lest she should forget, being absorbed in George, that he had been in it too, feeling a sudden desire for sympathy and admiration. He even talked with a little more difficulty than was necessary or perhaps thinking of it, his mind affected his voice. And he talked to her of things he had not mentioned to his mother; less because he was sparing her than because he had felt no inclination to speak of them. It had been a bad show, he said; the Germans had swept over in the dark and God knew where they had stopped, for he didn't, and he hadn't known anything after the dark and struggling and being suffocated by chlorine gas, until he found himself at the base. And now he was here. He looked round the room, at the curtains, still now that the door was shut, and at the narcissi and the roses, and at Irene herself with some surprise. When he was better he had to go and talk to an old man whose son had been in his company and was Missing, having got lost that morning. He had last seen or felt or heard him, he hardly knew which, before the gas blotted out everything. He looked troubled as though he was expected to find him and didn't know how to set about doing it. He might be a prisoner of course, he hoped, only faintly. The Germans had swept over everything. But the old man he knew somehow, was waiting for him, believing he could help him to find Martin. And not having been in the front line on March the 21st he could not possibly understand. She let him talk about it, wandering on, saying only that possibly Martin would have turned up before he had to go and see his father. Some news of him might come. For there had been nearly a hundred thousand prisoners taken that day, she said, a hundred thousand chances for Martin being one of them. And she talked of

Martin easily as though she knew him, and thought with a rather careful, controlled sympathy, which she must never allow to get out of control lest she should go mad (one could not carry all of them), of the old man, Martin's father. But Guy, lying looking at her in that troubled way, was searching impossibly for Martin in the dark, lost, bewildered, himself. Who was it that had gone up the steps ahead of him, his figure outlined for a moment against the sky, lit from end to end by a gun flash? That might have been Martin. Or someone who had stumbled against him outside and cursed. When it was dark you could only listen, and listening, he heard the sing-song cry of 'Stretcher bearer,' and someone beside him say, 'I'm hit,' and a groan. He hadn't known Martin very well, not being a particular friend of his, or he would have known. And now there was that old man who expected him to find his son for him.

Irene looked at him quickly. (She had come from George and she was going back to George.) She and George were going to Ireland she said, as soon as he was well enough. They would see the spring there for the first time since the War. Spring in Ireland. Her voice was a faint sigh. Her eyes seemed to have caught the darkness of the woods at Cappagh as though she was walking in them and would come out of them presently and stand by the lake and say, 'We've come to tea. And I'm afraid we're late, so late'

He saw the lake at Cappagh when she spoke, but it seemed so far away that he could not reach it. Philip had belonged to Cappagh and Cappagh to him. He turned to her, sure that she would understand. They would wonder, the people about Cappagh, the woods and lake too, old Dora the spaniel, everything, what had happened to Philip. They would look at him, waiting for Philip.

'Philip belonged to it,' he said 'Edmund Urquhart used to say that. He saw Philip there. Philip loved it, you know.'

He had tried to say something of the same kind to his

mother, conveying to her that he knew how much she had lost, knew too clearly that he was not Philip. He had written to her when Philip was killed, 'I am sorry for Father who loved him.' And he said now, 'I am so damned sorry for Philip losing Cappagh which he loved.' And his face was gloomy, seeing Cappagh shut in by its woods waiting for Philip who would never come.

Nancy Creagh had always been brave. She had written to him when Hubert was killed, guessing the fear he must have of their first meeting after. 'I shall not water you with my tears. I wept all I had for Philip.' And when he saw her first he only thought how young she looked in her black clothes, and how glad he was that Englishwomen didn't drape themselves in crêpe like Frenchwomen.

She was brave now, talking of Cappagh which was ready for Guy when he wanted it and never showing how hopelessly she longed for it. He was not ready for Cappagh and she thought she understood. Cappagh was too full of memories of his childhood and of Philip and Hubert. So they would go to Winds. But when she had gone, and Irene who had looked at him with such great sympathy and understanding and who was so easy to talk to, had gone too, he lay and thought of Cappagh where everything would be waiting for Philip, looking at him and thinking of Philip. The old people would say as they always said, whether it was true or not (but in this case, he thought, it would be true), 'Sure, it's always the best that's taken,' and Dora would whine about him, smelling him, and go back to her waiting for Philip.

He thought of Cappagh until the darkness of the woods that lay over the house like a shadow, lay over his face too, and when he slept he dreamed of searching for Martin Blake in the dark with his eyes blind and his throat choked with gas, trying to breathe and inhaling it and being asphyxiated. He heard someone stumbling beside him, put out his hand and could find nothing, feel nothing, his hand

numbed. Then someone fell with a groan, 'I'm hit,' and he awoke from the nightmare, crying, and a nurse came with a shaded light, stern and gentle, quietening him. He thought for a moment that he was a child, back with Philip in the nursery at Cappagh.

At Winds he might have been a schoolboy again, spending his holidays with Philip at Winds because their parents were in India. He found it easy to talk to Cynthia who was like a sister and Stella whom he knew less well. Only his mother stood outside, knowing that she was outside, looking on. 'I bore him,' she said to Cynthia, standing in the nursery which was dim even on a day of that wonderful spring. She went to the window and stood with her back to the room. 'Not bore,' she said, correcting herself. 'I worry him. One can understand' Cynthia comforted her in the strangest way. 'Captain Reid looked at Guy yesterday. I had thought him so well—but Captain Reid said, "There's a man who has been very badly gassed." He had only seen him once.'

Nancy Creagh accepted the comfort, rushing to seize it. Guy was a sick man still, a very sick man. But one of these days he would be well again and they would go to Cappagh together. Perhaps in the autumn. She thought of the chrysanthemums she had planted before the War. They would be overgrown and neglected and she would have to make the garden again. It would take a long time, and it stretched before her, an infinitely peaceful prospect, the task of making the garden again. All her life perhaps. But one of these days Guy would marry, and there would be children again at Cappagh. She wished Guy would marry quickly some nice girl she could love; she would be so ready to love Guy's wife.

'But I hope he will marry an Irish girl,' she said, confiding these thoughts to Cynthia. 'Anglo-Irish marriages are a risk. And Guy may be a little difficult even when

he is well again. And English people don't understand our ways.' And she thought of the little layer of dust and turf ash which lay on the chimneypiece at Cappagh and which Edmund Urquhart had brushed with his sleeve not discovering it; and how careless Irish servants were in monotony and how altogether wonderful in an emergency. But Guy's English wife perhaps wouldn't understand. Cynthia laughed because Nancy had so completely forgotten that she was English. She did not remind her and Nancy Creagh did not hear her laugh. For now, naturally, thinking of Anglo-Irish marriages, she was considering Irene and George.

She had come at last to have time for thinking, feeling that she had made her great effort and now nothing more could be asked of her. She and Guy might slip back to Cappagh any day now, leaving the War to go on without them. At Cappagh it would be quiet and full of memories of Hubert and Philip, and Guy would get quite well again and they could piece together the broken ruins of their life. And some day the War would end.

She could not speak of these things to Guy, who looked less well now than he had looked when she had gone to see him in hospital. He had been still a rosy-cheeked schoolboy when he went out and now his face was dark with a suggestion of unhealthy green in it and he hardly ever spoke. Sometimes he was irritable with her as though all her ways, all her gestures, maddened him and then was miserable afterwards, not knowing how to say he was sorry. Philip, she could not help remembering, had always said he was sorry when he had hurt her, which was not often, but Guy had been obstinate, finding it impossible to apologise. She hurried to assure herself that she was not hurt now, that Guy was only a sick child and she understood absolutely and she would have said that to him if she could. But a terrible embarrassment had grown up between them and when she was with Guy alone it was awful, for neither of

them could think of anything to say, and the silence was full of memories and mocked her, reminding her of how she had dreamed of having Guy back from the War to be hers again and to comfort her for everything. One of those nights after a day when he had been rude and had brought himself to apologise afterwards almost as though he hated her, she dreamed not of Philip or Hubert, but of Guy as though her memory held only Guy. And Guy was a small child, her only child, crying cold and frightened in the night, and she took him into her arms and warmed and comforted him.

She awoke to the May dawn in her room, coming through the open window and making the curtains and furniture shadowy. A bird whispered faintly outside and was answered by another, coming awake. Dawn drifted across the fields and over the old garden which lay beneath her window where only the ghostly paths remained. The wall-flowers in a bowl on the writing-table were wet with dew and filled the room with their scent. Smelling them, she remembered the roses clustering about the window of the Sussex inn where she and Hubert had spent his last leave. But, awake in the early morning, everything must always remind her now of seeing people off for the Front. She must, in that other life before the War, have got up early for other purposes, but she had forgotten them.

She went to the window and looked out. (In France David sleeping in a French farmhouse billet stirred and came half awake, thought himself at Winds and slept again) The dew was over everything, on her face, and she cried a little as no one had ever seen her cry for Hubert and Philip. Below her, the paths of the lost garden were like small grey ghosts in the half light. A rabbit crept out on the bank which had been a mass of primroses a week ago and sat in the wavering sunlight washing his face. Leaning out she could see the lake water still asleep and the delicate green of the young leaves, fairylike against the blackness of the pines and the rhododendrons. She opened the door and

stood in the corridor. It stretched before her, fading away in the grey unreality of the hour. As she went down it a little way in her bare feet she heard a pigeon coo under the gable at the end. It sounded peaceful and sleepy and she envied the pigeon.

She listened at Guy's door for a moment, to hear him breathing, and be comforted for that dream of a lost child crying in the dark. If she heard him breathing, the deep, peaceful, healthy breathing of someone sleeping dreamlessly, she would go back to bed comforted and forget that dream. But he was talking and she pushed the door open a little way, knowing that he was talking in his sleep. Her face in the pale light of the early May morning showed anxiety as she listened, searching for a clue, for something that might help her. A faint sunlight was coming into the room and a bird whispered again outside, a joyous and secret whisper. In the sunlight which caught half the bed, Guy moved about and talked to himself unintelligibly. She listened, holding her breath for a word, a clue that must help her. But she was shut outside as though he was a stranger speaking a strange tongue. Standing in the doorway where the sunlight coming in, reached her feet at last, she only knew that he was a child crying, frightened of the dark, and she could not find him to comfort him.

Dimly, she realised then, the problem that might later arise before her, of how to fill her life which had been so full up to now that it had slipped by unfelt. The garden at Cappagh might not be enough, she understood, looking at the narcissi which Cynthia had planted in the autumn with a sense of guilt and a faint wild hope that the War might be over before spring came again. Or earlier, watching the primroses creep out from the woods on to the banks and pursue each other over them as though they played a game. Stella said, looking at them in a puzzled way, that she never remembered so many primroses before, not in her childhood when she and David had gone gathering them. Or such a

sudden spring after that bitter cold. At the end of April it was like summer. And thank God, she thought, the winter was over in France and David had this weather. She did not say that aloud to Aunt Nancy, feeling vaguely the distance that lay between them because she was beginning, knowing now what Aunt Nancy had known early four years ago (it seemed much longer of course), and Aunt Nancy had been through it all and it was over. She hoped and prayed that David might get a slight wound and come home and stay at home until the War was ended. Time, she had heard Colonel Campbell saying to a group of officers in the drawing-room when they talked of the War and she and Cynthia listened and Miss Irving knitted socks endlessly, was on our side. She heard the minutes tick slowly, each one gone so much gained for David. She was lonely, missing David in spite of his letters, lonelier because at Winds everything reminded her of the things they had done together. She had thought, travelling home with Cynthia on a cold April evening after David went out, that it was going to be lovely to be with Cynthia again and have Cynthia to herself, anyhow. But Cynthia seemed to have gone back to Francis even when she talked and moved at Winds, and Stella knew that whatever happened, it wouldn't be, so terrible for Cynthia having Francis. She was secure in that and Stelia was left alone in a terrible insecurity.

Mary came for a long week-end and stood in the nursery looking down at Michael, seeing only Michael; and went away again seeming to go out of their lives as though she had only strayed into them by accident for a little while, marrying Godfrey, and had gone out of them again now that Godfrey was dead. And Aunt Nancy came and she had Guy, and Stella knew that she watched Guy all the time secretly, almost furtively as though she were afraid he might discover her watching. To Stella, Aunt Nancy seemed to be done with the War, no longer concerned with it, and Nancy Creagh herself, those days at Winds, felt outside

it, as though they had been sent back for a long rest. She and Guy together, their effort ended. But in comparative security and quietness she was able to think for the first time since the War began. And life stretched before her, long and desolate and empty; and even her garden at Cappagh might not fill it.

Stella looked at Guy, understanding his moods better than any of them. He slept in David's room which smelt again of uniform and leather and had lost that terrible tidiness. She heard him talking in his sleep at night as David had talked, or his deep breathing which waking, half asleep still, she sometimes thought was David's, forgetting that he was in France. They did things that she and David had done, that they had all done at Cappagh before the War. They set eel lines hopefully in the lake, and never caught anything. And they got out the old boat which was half rotten and baled the water out of it and pushed it between the islands, breaking down the reeds and putting up the water fowl which had been so long undisturbed. And it was so like and yet so unlike the lake at Cappagh. Sam, the black retriever, followed them to the bank and stood at the edge of the water, watching the birds and trembling. 'He'll have forgotten how to work,' Guy said, looking back at him. 'By the time Francis comes home There'll be plenty to shoot after all this time.' And he saw the lake at Cappagh in winter twilight, cold and still, and heard the duck coming in.

'There wasn't as much as you'd think,' Stella said. There'd been such a lot of poaching, especially since the camp came. But at Cappagh, Guy thought, seeing it and forgetting that his father and Philip were dead; there'd be no more poaching there than there had always been. He saw the lake water cold and grey turn faintly green, and the black woods beyond and the shadows at the edge. And later, the sky pink as the sun rose, the frosty trees fairylike against it. It was the best lake in the countryside for duck.

Stella said she and David had gone over to Heystead and tried the pond there last autumn. He had gone through the woods to the far side of the pond by the big tree and waited, and she had gone down into the valley the other side and walked up through the marshes clapping her hands. But there had been hardly anything. A pigeon or two from the trees on the hill above. But the lake before her had been absolutely quiet.

She did not confess how grateful she had felt for that quietness, for she had never liked that part of it. She had liked going through the fields, with David and Sam in the dusk, while they faded and the trees grew blacker, and climbing the stile where the brambles had grown over it and caught and held them. She had thought, it must be a long time then since anyone had come this way. They had stood in the shadow of the woods while David gave her instructions and Sam had stood listening and trembling between them. Then the boy and the dog had gone away along the top of the field that sloped to the water. She had seen their dark shapes in the half light until the dusk hid them. David walked slowly, his gun under his arm and Sam at his heels seemed for once to have forgotten Francis, or at least to have found something to do while he waited for Francis. She had gone down the hill slowly, opened the gate which creaked as a gate creaks only in twilight or dusk and gone through. Taking her time, to fill in the five minutes David had given her, she had stood the other side of the gate, waiting. Above the valley a cottage showed a lit window and the woods behind were darker by contrast. An owl called and was answered by another. The long cry in the dusk seemed full of mockery. She had thought, standing there, how secure and comfortable the lit cottage looked, and had wondered if anyone had gone out from it to the War.

Something rustled in a bramble bush beside her and an owl called again, a long laughing cry as though it mocked.

It had been a still evening with no wind. Earlier there had been rain and the valley was full still of the feeling of it. Walking towards the pond (David must be at the big tree by now) she had come quickly into the marshes at the edge. She had stumbled about, over her ankles in water, clapping her hands. Nothing got up from the water which lay quiet and still in the dusk. But a flock of pigeons flew out from the trees above her head, and she had heard David begin to shoot.

There hadn't been much, she said to Guy. No duck at all. They hadn't come in perhaps. She didn't believe anyone had been poaching there. (She remembered the stile hidden in brambles.) But Guy thought of the lake at Cappagh and forgot for a moment that Philip was dead and that he was not Philip and that everything at Cappagh, the house, the woods, the lake, even Dora who had belonged to Philip, would remind him that he was not Philip and wonder why he had come instead.

Stella, waking in the early morning, heard, not Guy talking in his sleep, but the sound of bugles in the park beyond the lake. It was a draft going out. They went out from the camp once or twice a week and they had got used to it now. People came across the lawn when they were playing tennis in the afternoon, or evenings as they grew longer, and said good-bye because they were going to France to-morrow.

The first time it had happened and a young Gunner who had been a friend of hers, bringing artillery horses and riding with her in the early morning (comforting her for David) stood on the lawn with his hand held out and said good-bye because he was going to France to-morrow, she had been playing tennis. She had asked someone vaguely to take her place and had walked with him across the lower lawn trying to think of something to say. But the news he had brought seemed to have taken him already away from her, made him a stranger so that they could only talk

formally and politely as strangers. And anything, she felt, that she said, would be inadequate. Nor, she realised horribly, did it matter. For in this case he was going out much too soon, having been sent home for six months and having had only two of them. He had ridden with her, racing the staid army horses over the Downs, had played tennis with her, had laughed a lot, making not very good jokes, had danced with her. She had talked to him about David quite easily and had been less lonely, confusing him somehow with David. But now he was going back into a companionship which she could not share, a world she could not enter. Going, with no merciful illusion to spare him the full knowledge of what lay before him, there was still something which she understood as relief. Otherwise this parting would have been different. He would have held her hand a little longer, stood a little longer on the lower lawn which they did not use now because it was impossible to keep two tennis courts going with no proper gardener. He would have shown her that he went unwillingly, held to something as long as he might. But he seemed detached suddenly as though nothing here, nothing that they had done together, nor any of this, really mattered. He had just been passing through a strange country and he was going back now to the country to which he belonged.

She said, searching vainly for something, standing facing him, and finding nothing, 'I am so sorry, so terribly sorry. We all are.' Somewhere in the background Cynthia murmured the same words and remembered how Francis had gone away. It seemed ridiculous somehow. One didn't go away to a War, such a War, from a tennis party.

He looked at her as she stared at him in that helpless way, trying to find something which she never found, and thanked her for all their kindness and would she thank Mrs. Seymour again for him.

'I shall hear you go to-morrow morning,' Stella said.
'You'll be asleep.'

'No, I shan't.' A shadow fell over her face.

He didn't want her to hear them going, or to think of him. The going away was the worst part. But when you got back, well, your friends were all there, and England didn't seem much of a country these days. Every man who went on leave came back, saying it was no place for a man, and he was jolly glad to get back to France. He was there in spirit already as he shook Stella's hand and went away.

She had got used to the bugles and slept through them the next morning, waking to the May sunlight and the quietness outside which seemed greater for some sound that had gone before, a sound she had not heard, being asleep. She was overwhelmed with remorse as though she had failed someone, letting them go alone. She had meant to get up and dress and go across the dew-drenched fields to a gap in the hedge through which she could watch them pass by. But she had slept and the silence to which she awoke was the silence left after someone had gone away. It was a relief when it was broken by splashing in the lake as soldiers crept down the bank in the morning sunlight to bathe, against orders. She never knew whether Geoffrey Soames survived the war or was killed. He had said good-bye to her on the tennis lawn at Winds where he had so often played, and had gone out of her life.

Chapter 19

CYNTHIA looked up from a letter to Francis, finding herself alone with Nancy Creagh, to ask if she thought it was all right about Stella and all those young men. But if it wasn't all right—she looked through the window at Stella playing tennis with three subalterns outside—she didn't quite see what she was going to do about it. Nancy Creagh thought there was safety in numbers and without them Stella would have missed David more. And it was good to have the house full of them and to take them in as they did when they were ill (there was one recovering from bad influenza in Godfrey's room now), and to have them in in the evenings when it was too dark for tennis and a fire was pleasant even in this wonderful weather. And they played the piano and sang songs and it was exactly she thought, like a Club, or a Y.M.C.A. or some such place, only of course much nicer. They were all so alike that she could hardly distinguish one from another, and she had never been good at names and was less good now, she said, that she was growing old, so that she mixed them all fearfully. But they didn't seem to mind . . . (anyhow their names didn't really matter, only their uniforms, which sometimes troubled the old dogs—Jack, Godfrey's dog, and Sam. The younger dogs had got used to the curious bewildering smell).

"You see," Cynthia said with difficulty. "There might be someone quite unsuitable. Stella is so young."

But Nancy Creagh was sure Stella didn't like one more than another, and at least if she did, that one was changed constantly. And you couldn't expect anything else. She didn't think Cynthia need worry. "It is such a crowded world," she said, feeling a little bewildered like the dogs. "There are so many people. But when the War is over we

shall go back to living with just a few people and we shall see them all clearly. I think Stella can hardly sort them out
And then they are always changing'

They missed Captain Brown who had been sent out again in March, with no heart for it because he left a wife and child in a Sussex country town. But as the evenings grew longer they were out later and there was less music, and an engineer who was good with his hands, mended the boat so that it didn't leak any longer and they could row on the lake in safety. If there was nothing to do they were quite content lying on the grass watching other people play tennis or walking in the garden or by the lake while the light faded and the sky, turning to faint green, was reflected in the water. As they came to talk more easily bits of conversation drifted through the dusk 'In that show . . .' 'Well, they shelled us, you see . . . We were in support. But the artillery got the worst of it. . . .' Someone stirred hearing a name 'Chudleigh . . . an engineer fellow. I met him in '16. (Their memories like Stella's went no further back than 1914.) I heard he had been killed. Oh, wasn't he? A mistake then.' Sometimes someone laughed, that peculiar laugh which no one could ever recapture afterwards or hear in their heads. 'Blessed if our own Archies weren't dropping shells on us. . . .' A man turned, lying on his face to draw a map on the grass. 'We were here you see,' but the summer dusk (it was summer already in early May) crept down hiding the grass and the speaker and the map he would have drawn and the dew was wet as he felt his hands against it, and suddenly they all thought it was a bit chilly out here and the long windows of the drawing-room showed flickering firelight and they went in, walking a little stiffly and stumbling almost as though they had marched a long way and were tired. The flames flickering and leaping, lit up their faces, making strange shadows on them and caught the metal on their uniforms as they came in through the door stumbling against each other in that tired way.

Stella stood by the hearth with the firelight on her new white frock (almost grown up), and said: 'We wondered when you were coming Wasn't it a bit cold?' And she watched them come in through the door and knew them all so well that it was hardly necessary to sort one out from the other, or to give him a name. She was not bewildered like Nancy Creagh, because she couldn't remember any other world than this Or at least she had never lived in any other world. She remembered Cappagh before the War, and Philip and Edmund Urquhart, and Irene Marsham, as clearly as people in a book she had read and remembered, or a picture she had seen. But that wasn't real as this world crowded with people, was real.

Someone drifted to the piano, and played from memory so that they need not light the lights. She could not see who it was. Only his figure, and sometimes the side of his face at the piano when a flame lit up the room for a moment and died down again

He must be new, she thought They often found strangers playing tennis on the lawn, and men went away and others came to take their place. One knew nothing about them, their homes or where they lived, if they were married and had children. (But that one knew very soon for the married ones carried photographs about and showed them rather shyly.) It was not so easy to know at once which were engaged and therefore less interesting although one had no desire to be engaged to them oneself. But engaged men were dull, duller even than married men. Stella looked at the stranger at the piano whom she could not see clearly. She sat on the floor just beyond the marble pillar of the chimney-piece, leaning back against the wall. Only her skirt was in the firelight turned to rose colour. The man at the piano played, and sometimes she saw his face for a moment, and didn't recognise him. But only his uniform mattered and the firelight showed her his uniform too before it left him in shadow again, hidden, only the music coming to show

where he was. About the open fireplace the others sat in a circle, leaning forward, smoking their pipes or cigarettes and the wood flames lit their faces, sunburned and weather-beaten from the life in camp, their hands holding their pipes, red and rough too. The flames dying down, showed their legs in puttees and field boots. The room smelt of wood smoke and wallflowers, and a bowl of tulips was shadowy against the uncurtained window. The firelight threw strange shadows over the faces in the room making them terrible at times, as though now they were off guard and all that they had endured might show. Someone shook out a pipe between the music. Away in the corner of a recess by the window a voice softened carefully told a story. (Never once by any chance did they tell of anything that had happened before the War.) 'If you go along that road you'll find them,' he said. 'And, my God, you should have seen it—that road!' Nothing of it left. It was marked on the map all right with a church and a shrine, but they were gone too. The map was out of date by some weeks.'

Stella, leaning against the wall, hidden herself, turned her head to search for the speaker, but she could not find him. Only a flame springing up from the log, showed her the little group about the fire, leaning forward to it, as though they were cold, their faces rosy in the firelight, darkly shadowed.

She had found another gunner subaltern to take Geoffrey Soames' place. Gunners were useful because they had unlimited horses even if they weren't always very exciting horses. Jim Humphreys had come straight from Sandhurst and he had never been out. It cut him off from all the rest in an immense loneliness. He too was shut out from a world he could not enter, and a companionship he could not share. It was all right for the old Colonels and Majors who had most of them seen a bit of the War, enough to talk about, or had at any rate seen a bit of some other war, the South African or some show on the Indian frontier. They could talk together and they had ribbons to wear, and anyhow,

they were outside this companionship of a generation doomed to death, a companionship which no one outside could possibly understand.

'It would be so much easier really——' Stella leaned on the gate at the end of the lake path looking into sunlight. She gripped the wood with her hands. 'One isn't just saying it. But to go oneself—not to be left behind and to see someone you love—and just wait. And if . . .' the sunlight dazzled her eyes as she bent before it. 'It would be quicker anyhow and then it would be over. And it's lonely'

Jim Humphreys said, God knew that he knew it was. And they stood together in their piteous companionship. He murmured something, about everyone he knew at school. . . . And if by any chance he didn't get there. And he leaned on the gate where she had so often leaned with David, and she could hardly see him apart from David. His face was white, tortured with conflicting emotions because he had wind up badly at times, learning more from the silence of the men he lived with, than he might have learned if they had talked. He learned in loneliness, coldly with no help, as though he walked up the road to the firing line alone with no companionship. There were moments when he would have given anything in the world to have escaped going, dreaming nightmare dreams of the Somme and Passchendaele and the twenty-first of March at St. Quentin, terrible names, which had been landmarks on the road of his boyhood, too. And in the morning he only wanted to go at once, to get there, hurry to it, so that at least he might meet those others and face their eyes.

'But you'll get there,' Stella said, almost coldly. The sunlight hurt her face

'You don't mind a bit.' He looked at her pleadingly, seeing only the sun in her hair. She was cruel, unaware of him, thinking only of David. Nothing in the world that happened to anyone really mattered so long as David was safe. One had to reduce one's demands on God to a minimum.

She had reduced hers, asking nothing for anyone else. She was troubled about a move he had mentioned in his last letter. 'They say we're going south, but no one knows anything.'

That 'no one knows anything.' was terrifying, making her feel the helplessness and impotence of all humanity swept along, broken and killed by some gigantic machine. Not knowing even where they went. Only 'they say we're for the . . .' or 'they say we are going to do that.' She was frightened of any change, any move. She had come to know the place where David was, his life of digging trenches, for he had been with a pioneer battalion behind the line, the people he lived with; Severn (his letters were full of a man called Severn, and she hated him at times), who had almost every decoration it was possible for him to have, and Goff who had been a friend of Godfrey's and of course was quite a senior person. David had gone into Godfrey's regiment, but he hadn't found many people there now of his brother's generation. Goff had spoken to him at once. He had heard he was coming from Mary. Stella, reading David's letters, remembered vaguely that Captain Goff had come once or twice to Winds for a week-end, but she could hardly sort him out among so many. He had just been labelled as Godfrey's friend and Mary's. When she had stayed with Godfrey and Mary in London before the War, so long ago that she could hardly remember it, Mr. Goff as he had been then, had often been there too. David said that Goff couldn't talk much sense about the War—he added that he had been out a long time—but he knew lots about hunting. And David wished he could wangle a transfer from this regiment where the men were mostly C3 and a depressing lot. They were nearly all done with the War and were troubled already about what they were going back to, when it was over. David who had not got to it yet could have nothing in common with them. But the spring country was lovely, he acknowledged half unwillingly. They were digging through cornfields and meadows and into woods in preparation for

the next German break through, in case they got as far as that. Stella kept a picture of the country David described where he dug trenches all day and it was spring

It had built a sort of security for her in her thoughts of David, this world she knew, even apart from the fact that it was twelve miles behind the line. Anything one knew was less terrifying than the unknown. (It was only unopened letters that held joyous surprises never to be recaptured) But now David was going south and no one knew anything. And she slipped away one of those May evenings when the light was fading, having an impulse to creep through the darkness of the woods about the lake and come into light the other side, as she and David had so often done.

She had left Cynthia and the others in the garden where the paths were growing pale and the shadows were soft with the fading light of the sky. A branch of an unpruned briar rose caught her dress as she went by it and she tore it away quickly and secretly, hardly knowing why she had this sudden impulse to go. She turned outside the garden wall and ran through the narrow wood. Between the trees she saw the lake water lying quiet under the sky. She slipped into the shadows, hiding in them, as she heard someone coming.

He ran, stumbling, as though he was not used yet to the heavy soldier's boots he wore; passing her and then hesitating and standing still searching the darkness Instinct told him there was someone there—near him, hiding in the woods, although he could only see the black trunks of the trees and the light beyond.

Her heart hammered oddly as though she was being pursued and was frightened. One could be frightened, playing hide and seek, working oneself into an ecstasy of terror as David had done in childhood when Nanny played at being a lion and he had lifted the cover of the nursery table under which he hid, showing a small terrified face. 'Don't be it. Be Nanny'

She stood behind a tree, her heart hammering. Seeing

him go past in the pale light between the dark trunks, she called, forgetting: 'David.'

She had seen his shoulders, the line of the strap across his back, his belt, the neat waist and flare of his tunic which hurt her in some strange way making her catch her breath and want to cry. She forgot, calling David, and whispering his name in the dusk.

He turned back. He had been right then. He searched for her and could not find her. 'Stella, I say. I heard you running. Where are you? It's Jim.' He thought she had confused names calling him David.

She slipped out from behind the trunk, stared at him for a moment in a glade between the trees, her face ghostly in the grey twilight.

He said uncomfortably. 'It's dark in here. Let's go on the lake or something. Stella! I say there's something I want to tell you. Let's go on the lake. The moon's getting up.' He turned to look through the trees at the still water lying waiting for them.

'Not now. And if it's dark I know where it's light, where it is always light. David and I discovered it.' She made a sound which he thought was laughter, but she was crying a little because she must share what she and David had held, for fear she should be left altogether alone and the darkness close over her. Something in his voice disturbed her and frightened her. Not that yet, although she had played with the idea, pretending, living up to Margery, persuading herself about Maurice Liddell. His letters had grown less frequent and she had almost forgotten him in her crowded world. He hadn't come home for his last leave, spending it in Paris instead. You used up half of it travelling if you went to England, he said, but that was not the real reason. More and more, men going back from France, were finding themselves strangers in England and becoming frightened of it.

She thought of Maurice Liddell for the first time for

weeks, hiding from Jim Humphreys in the woods. The dusk was thickening between the trees, making a branch, a bush, a stump where a tree had been cut down, into terrifying fantastic monsters. There was a young May moon beyond the blackness of the pine trees turning the water faintly silver. It was delicate, intangible, not like the flooding light of a moon which has reached its full. It caught a strip of water between the islands, blackened the shadows at the edge, and reached an open space in the woods as Stella and Jim Humphreys went through. Branches coming out of the undergrowth in a line might have been rifles with fixed bayonets. The moonlight made them gleam like steel. The young foliage of a beech tree at the edge of the wood turned to silver, hid a sniper whose tree climbing days were not so far away as to be forgotten. Black trunks were men watching and waiting, holding their breath, immovable. Through all a faint mist came, clinging to the black branches and the silver leaves and the grass. May dew, not gas.

He had never known the terror of wood fighting or the strange horror of a wood, beautiful with spring foliage hiding men and guns. No one had ever stumbled beside him cursing that the wood was full of them, before he died. He only saw the moonlight on Stella's frock as she slipped away from him. He went after her. 'I can see your frock . . . now the moon is up. You can't hide, you know, in that frock.' And he lost her. She called before him mockingly.

'Can you find me now?' He left the moonlight behind and plunged into darkness. A bush of thorns caught him (not wire, or a thicket of bayonets with men behind them) and he stumbled away from it with blood on his face and hands.

'Stella. Wait a minute.' He heard only silence through all the woods, where here and there a tree was edged with silver, a leaf glimmered. But nothing moved. The silence was menacing. He fled from it (had he lost her?) and found his feet on the path suddenly. The trees parted over his head showing the evening sky, faint pink and green. The moon-

light warred against it and was beaten back. He saw her at the end of the path leaning on the gate looking into the marshes beyond. Her frock glimmered palely, her hair was a dark shadow. Beyond her the cattle moved, great shapes in the dusk, which the moonlight had not yet driven before it. The two lights seemed to be struggling against each other. The cattle before the moon reached them, moved their feet in water or in marshy ground with a deep, peaceful sound. When it crept over the woods and lit a pool in the marshes it showed them black against a silver world. A sleepy bird twittered in a bush beside the gate as though wakened suddenly from sleep—(by men fighting, or gas coming across like mist killing and shrivelling everything in its path). A branch creaked as though someone pushed it aside going through the woods. The cattle moved off a little, in search of richer grass.

'It is so quiet, isn't it?' she whispered. 'So peaceful,' and thought of David, reducing all her prayers, all her demands only to David, asking nothing in the world for anyone else. She heard the branch break and turned, searching the darkness. They had come softly without a sound. The mossy path was so soft that she had not heard him come behind her or known he was there until she turned her head. But she wondered what had broken the branch as though someone pushed it away, and heard a twig snap as though someone walked on it. Perhaps people came back, she thought dreamily, people who had walked in woods and fields and loved them and left something there. She searched the darkness and could find nothing.

'You are not cold.' He could think of nothing else to say. She was cold and ghostly standing there in her white frock, her face pale in the twilight. When she moved, a branch of a tree threw shadows over her frock and on her face. The shadows seemed to lie between them so that he could not reach her. He stumbled. He had something to say. She would not listen, running away from him like that. But

he knew she would listen. He would triumph forlornly over her, defeating her now.

'I've got orders, Stella, at last. We go to-morrow at dawn.'

The moon went suddenly behind a small cloud. No bird twittered sleepily, coming awake before some terror of men fighting, a mist that killed all before it. The world was only drenched in dew creeping over the marshes into the woods like mist. No ghost walked through them snapping a twig, pushing back a branch. The cattle up to their knees in water chewed peacefully. He saw it, and felt it all with a strange clearness as something he must remember all his life, carry with him as though it were the last thing he had seen before his eyes were blinded, as Guy Creagh carried with him the smell of that dug-out before the gas came over.

Stella saw and felt it too. She would remember it all her life, with this spring, the late April of primroses and this wonderful May David's weather, she thought of it. All her life she would remember it as David's weather.

She turned and stared at him palely, her face half hidden. Everything about him seemed suddenly to have an enormous significance which she had somehow missed before. His belt, the strap across his shoulder which must in time make a mark on his body, the smell of his uniform and the leather which all the efforts of his servant could not make like the old weather-stained leather other men wore. The belt was to hang a revolver from, to carry ammunition. His lanyard carried a whistle if he should need it. And he would have a gas mask slung under his chin like a child's bib, and a steel helmet, and the weight of his equipment would make him stoop a little against the pull of it.

'Oh,' she sighed in the darkness, her face as pale as her frock. He missed the little movement of her hands pressed together in pain. 'You are going to-morrow. To France.'

'You don't mind really?' He tried to find something, coming closer. 'If you minded, Stella, it would make all the difference. I'm frightened at times.' He almost sobbed.

and broke off, having said it 'I couldn't say that to anyone but you.' All the woods stood still, no wind stirring their branches, listening. 'You can't help being,' he excused himself 'The others say, that—that the best men have wind up at times.' He straightened himself and stood away from her a little. 'I don't mind being killed,' he said, his voice controlled again 'I'm only frightened of being maimed. Pray for me, Stella, that I may not be maimed, that if necessary, I may be killed.'

She looked at him vaguely All her prayers were for David. How could God listen? He couldn't listen to so many, because people were being killed every day in spite of prayers And the War didn't end although everyone prayed for peace

She was cold, wrapped away from him in the dusk and the mist that was rising from the marsh outside He said almost curiously, 'Do you care a little, Stella, because I am going? You must know how I feel. I didn't mean to say anything because you're so young and your sister has been so decent to me, to all of us. But when I come back . . . if you'll wait for me.'

She didn't know. She was only troubled, disturbed and frightened before something which must make life more difficult, more serious and complicated than it had ever been before. It wasn't thrilling as Margery insisted. But that, she supposed, was because she wasn't in love with him She almost disliked him for a moment. She was tired And she wished he had just gone on being friends. She had almost stood away from him for a minute, coldly, with that new aversion But seeing his face turned to her pleadingly, and the uniform he wore, all of which had a new, terrible significance, she went back to him. If he wanted to kiss her and he was going to the Front, well, she supposed, she couldn't refuse him that, although there was a terrible sense of irrevocability about that first kiss She would have spent something which she could never have again. But the hard

leather of his belt against her hurting her a little was like David's when she had kissed David good-bye, and she moved her hand over his shoulder as she had moved her hand over David's shoulder, making sure of something. She was warm suddenly with her love for David, turning to Jim and kissing him because he was going to the Front, simply and passionately.

She knew clearly that whatever happened he would come back to her changed as those other men were changed and the companionship that had brought them together would be broken.

'I shan't mind so much now,' he said, leaning on the gate for the last time and looking across the marshes where here and there a pool glimmered. A bullock moved its feet in water with a luxurious peaceful sound. 'Now I know you care a little.'

He took her hand and she left it in his. They held hands like children, both thinking of to-morrow. It wouldn't be lonely any more, he thought, anyhow. He'd be able to meet those other fellows after he had been there. He turned, trying to find Stella, but though he held her hand she stood away from him in her loneliness, thinking of David.

That night a tired British division took over a sector of the French Front, moving up under cover of the semi-darkness (the moon was less clear in France than it was at Winds) which hid the woods before them, fairylike in beauty with the thick foliage of May. A French Commandant handing over, told them that things were quiet enough at present. But if the Germans attacked, he said cheerfully, with the woods in front of them and the river and the canal behind them, they would find themselves 'like rats in a trap.'

At the end of May David was reported 'Missing, believed killed.' For Stella the road led to the Chemin des Dames and ended there.

Chapter 20

ON NOVEMBER 11TH, 1918, Stella was out riding with a Yeomanry captain whose regiment had replaced the Scottish battalion moved elsewhere in the spring. The captain was a Civil Servant in peace time and went up to London every day by the same train from a Surrey village where he lived with his mother and sister. He was in the early thirties although he looked older and he had a certain serious stability in a world that was growing more and more unstable. He had Irish blood which accounted for his sense of humour although even when he laughed he did not lose his air of seriousness. They had drifted into friendship with him without trouble and the friendship had deepened in those days after the telegram came about David when the others who had come every day to play tennis stayed away and the lawns remained deserted through the wonderful weather. Walter Leslie, who had been away on leave, came back about that time, and he had ridden over to say how sorry he was, standing in the doorway to say it.

'You will stay to lunch,' Cynthia said, and as he hesitated, she reassured him, saying in effect as Nancy Creagh had said that he need not be frightened of them. They would not water him with their tears.

No further information had been obtainable about David beyond the bare statement that he was Missing, Believed Killed. It would hardly be obtainable before the War ended they realised, now that they knew something of what had happened that May morning.

Walter Leslie accepted the reassurance with relief, and Cynthia said he might tell the others to come and play. It was silly leaving the lawn empty like that and lying wasted. He'd tell the other fellows, he said, standing beside Cynthia and looking across the room out of the window to the lawn

where the net hung loose with a dejected air. It was such wonderful weather, Cynthia said. And he agreed. By Jove, wasn't it marvellous? David's weather, Stella thought, seeing the curtain stir a little at the window, the sunlight on a blue border beside the path, outside.

Some time in the summer the Germans really started going back, and Walter Leslie, riding over for a week-end stood in the drawing-room full of the scent of roses and someone said what good news it was, and he agreed, blinking his eyes which he never seemed able to open properly, that it was wonderful, by Jove, wasn't it? An elderly Colonel who had found the years 1914 and 1915 gave him enough of war and had spent the time since in vague jobs at home, supposed that there'd be an Army of Occupation. And being a nice country gentleman with a chivalrous feeling towards a fallen foe he wouldn't, he said, like to be in it. Stella said nothing because it didn't really matter now; but looking at Cynthia she knew that Cynthia was thinking of Francis. The end of the War had something to bring her

'We haven't,' she said to Walter Leslie, eating the first strawberries with him in the garden, 'gone into mourning or anything like that.'

She picked a strawberry, hot with the sun on it and thought of picking strawberries with David. Well, David she supposed, having a sudden mood of religious faith and exaltation, was finding strawberries hot with a more wonderful sun in Paradise Her mood dropped, leaving her depressed and miserable. Walter Leslie said in his serious practical way, that they were quite right, and life wasn't long enough Certainly, she thought eating strawberries and not tasting them, life was not long enough, not for people like David now If he had lived till thirty, she thought, she wouldn't have minded so much. And she really believed that, looking at Walter Leslie almost resentfully because he had lived so long

Coming back from the garden, they met Cynthia and

Guy who was on light duty now, and had come for the week-end. They were waiting to play tennis and had been looking for them.

'What have you been doing?' Guy wanted to know.

'Eating strawberries.'

'Or trying to look into Captain Leslie's eyes,' he teased her as they were left alone.

She laughed.

'I haven't succeeded in doing that. Do you think he ever opens them?'

'I expect he did before some shell exploded too close to him,' Guy said. 'Go and change, Stella.'

On that November day she rode with Walter Leslie even if she had not succeeded in looking into his eyes. They cantered up the sloping field behind the house, in and out of the trees, put the horses over a low bank, and a ditch, and did figures of eight following each other. The horses were used to it, needing little guiding.

'They've taught so many town and suburban officers like myself, to ride,' Walter Leslie said, 'that they could run a school on their own now.' They cantered a little. It was a soft November day with an autumn sun lighting the brown hedges and the trees. A bank had been beautifully curved in the liquid sunlight as they went over it. The horses followed each other like trained, school horses.

'I just had to do whatever you did,' she laughed as she pulled up beside him. A low stone wall dividing the field from another made him think of Ireland, he said. He had been stationed there and had discovered how strong his Irish blood was. He went away from her up the field to a gap where someone had gone over before, knocking off the top stones.

'He won't understand it,' she called after him. 'Unless he's an Irish horse.' She was superior in her knowledge of stone walls from her experience at Cappagh. She waited, watching him, holding her own horse with difficulty. He

whinnied restlessly, twitching his ears, trying to follow. She heard the scramble of hoofs on the stones as Walter Leslie went over, taking a bit of the wall with him.

'All right,' she said, and let her horse go, following him. In the field the other side they heard shouting from the camp. She had forgotten that they had been waiting for that. Letting the horses crop grass, they listened for a moment, then turned and looked at each other.

'Well, it's over,' he said.

He took out a cigarette and stooped, lighting it. If his face showed anything, it was hidden from her. He could always keep his eyes closed anyway, hiding his thoughts. She turned an unwilling horse who found the grass good in the sunlight, towards the shadow of the woods. He waited for her, smoking until she came back. The smoke made a small blue cloud in the still, damp air.

'I don't feel anything,' she said 'Do you?'

She sat holding the reins, watching him as though he might help her.

He did not answer at once. He felt certainly a faint regret for this, and he looked at the grass beneath him and at the trees, red and yellow with the sunlight on them, and a hedge wet and shining and the stone wall which had stirred his Irish blood, lying against a blue November sky. His horse with the reins loose, moved a little, step by step, hoof by hoof as a horse moves when he is grazing. He heard the creak of the saddle and the sound of a horse cropping grass, as he looked before him, seeing the things that he was sorry to leave. They seemed to look back at him regrettfully, and the sun going behind a cloud left them cold as though they faded away from him while he watched, going out of his reach. He would go back now to the office that he had left for the War, and he was lucky that they had kept his job open for him and to be in a Government office so that he could get there at half-past ten and leave at five. And the train journey every morning and evening, and week-ends

playing golf and tennis with men like himself An infinitely pleasant prospect it had seemed many times in France; but these intervals of war with nothing much to do, and a horse to ride and a captain's pay and allowances to spend, had been good enough.

He said, opening his eyes a little and closing them again as though the sunlight was strong enough to hurt them

'Well, I suppose a lot of good fellows' lives will be saved.' And he wondered how many had gone over before eleven o'clock that morning. He wished he was in France. That would be the place to feel something He looked at Stella sympathetically knowing why she felt nothing, and they rode slowly along the field with the November sky, blue and white over them and the grey stone wall cutting it and he heard the soft thud of the horses' feet put down on turf and their deep snorting and breathing. They jumped a ditch and scrambled over a bank into a thin wood where the trees grew so far apart that they could hide nothing. Twigs cracked under them as they passed, wet leaves were cold against their faces as they bent to avoid a branch. Coming out into sunlight again, they heard renewed cheering from the camp in the valley below.

'So that's that,' he said, and they rode down the hill together in silence The other side of the house the woods about the lake showed, here and there a beech tree brown against the darkness of the pines. She stared at them, thinking of Jim Humphreys who had kissed her and said good-bye just beyond the shadow of the woods. His face turned to hers had been pale, as though he were already dead, she thought now, as he had stood in the faint light, his body dark against it, the moon catching the star on his shoulder which like everything else about him had taken on suddenly an enormous significance He had been killed that summer when the Germans were going back, in country where the woods in summer were still beautiful and the grass grew and he was buried at the edge of a wood

where the ground sloped to a still sheet of water below. When the tide of war had gone on, the water lay quiet under a summer sky or gleamed silver at night and the owls called to each other through the woods. Stella only knew that she had read his name in the papers and that she had said good-bye to him just before David was killed. And she was glad she had kissed him, for she would have felt terrible afterwards remembering his pale face turned to her, seeing the shape of his shoulders in the faint light and the little glimmer of his one star.

She rode down the hill with Walter Leslie in silence. A chapter of life had ended. No one knew how or when the next chapter would begin, or what to do with it.

Chapter 21

SOLDIERS going up to the line at night guided by a tape, had passed other soldiers going down, ghostly figures, half hidden. Voices had spoken, felt for each other in the darkness. 'Who are you, chum?'

Some regiment they had never heard of, might answer. A regiment and a man they had never seen in their lives. Nor did they ever see them. They passed, coming from obscurity, going to obscurity.

'Such and such a regiment. Such and such a division . . . who are you?'

Answer and the inevitable question 'What's it like now? Many shells falling? Good trenches? And how's Jerry?'

Then movement again in two columns. 'Good-bye, chum.'

'Good-bye. Good luck.' Stumbling figures in the darkness, a plunge over wire. A torrent of obscene language. Another man on top of the first who had fallen, all the line broken. Then a short run to catch up the front party because they were losing touch.

After the Armistice, prisoners newly set free from work behind the lines, wandered through them, wearing old uniforms once worn by German soldiers. They went back without jubilation, without enthusiasm. A certain dullness of expression common to all prisoners, marked them. They were almost indistinguishable from German prisoners still in camps in England. The War was over, but they had lost touch and no running along a tape in the darkness could enable them to catch up. 'Who are you?' was a question they hardly knew how to answer. What had they been before they became prisoners who are the same the world over? 1/6th such and such. Taken prisoner in '16. And the months between stretched out interminably, cutting

them off from their fellow men and an experience they had not shared. They met an Army grown younger and younger in which the pre-war Army was now represented mainly by the Staff and a few senior officers. There rose up on every side of them the ghosts of men who had died while they were prisoners, and stolid boy privates stared at them, not understanding these men who had been taken prisoner as long ago as '16, in battles of which they had never heard.

They directed them back (they needn't stumble now in the dark, not daring to show a light, lying flat when a shell went up), and they went through the quiet autumn country where trees stood and fields were tilled and the devastated area was a nightmare, forgotten. In that peaceful country which had been behind the German line most of the War, they were ghosts searching for something they remembered and perhaps almost longing for the familiarity of stumps of trees looking like masts of ships and the friendliness of No Man's Land. And shattered towns they knew . . . Merville and Armentières and Bethune. They had been prisoners for so many months, so many days, not knowing what was happening to the comrades they were separated from (perhaps going up the line to-night, guiding themselves by that tape; feeling in the darkness for other figures going down. . . . 'Who are you, chum? . . .') with no guiding idea for their lives, without discipline of their own, and opposed in duty to the enforced prison discipline, that now they were lost. They had no need to report and explain themselves, because their faces marked them as prisoners.

Officers had been better treated than the men. They were not made to work, and German Army discipline could not permit a private soldier or N.C.O. to bully an officer even if he was a prisoner. German officers naturally could not be in charge of prisoners, so officers could play tricks on their jailors which would have earned for them if they had been privates, a blow with a rifle from a German N.C.O. Having no work to do they had more time for thinking,

and after three years of thinking Francis Seymour and a thousand others were coming home. He would stay the night in London and refit (he could hardly imagine himself in a London shop), and travel down to meet Cynthia at Winds. They had arranged that Possibly each had a secret fear which they never shared with anyone, that at the station if they met there, one of them might fail to recognise the other.

Maurice Liddell who had been Francis' friend, knew perhaps more than Cynthia, for he tried to convey some warning.

'He's been a prisoner,' he said, as though she did not know better than anyone in the world that Francis had been a prisoner. And he sat apart, shut away from her, with Francis whom he loved. 'All those months not knowing what was happening; poor old Francis!'

He looked at Cynthia and thought: 'My God, she's beautiful.' And he starved with Francis for her, in a prison camp. For days and nights in France he had been hungry for a room like this and firelight and the scent of flowers and the faint perfume of a woman's hair. It seemed now that it was this room he had dreamed of, and of Cynthia, and he looked at her and hungered for her again with Francis. He saw how radiant she looked and that she didn't know that there was anything to be frightened of. And he sat in the drawing-room at Winds that afternoon, talking about prison until the fields outside were damp and dark and melancholy, and the shadows ran through the long corridors and crept through the rooms and all of them were full of menace, of some fear that beset men who were prisoners.

A photograph of Francis stood on a table where the fire-light caught it. She looked at it, steadyng herself against some fear Maurice had brought with him. She had thought that all fear was over for ever, pitying those others for whom the end had come too late.

Francis' eyes looked back at her, open and steady His shoulders stooped a little under his love for her, giving back love for love

'You are trying to warn me of something,' she said.
'Three years . . . it is nearly that'

He said softly after her, 'Three years. Is it all that? My God Poor old Francis.'

But she and Francis hadn't changed, she told him; not in three years. They would have known She would have felt, have known it all, at once, better than anyone She held him away with the fear he brought, because Francis was hers She would have known or Francis would have known, if such a thing were possible. Not only from his letters, those letters he had written two or three times a week But she and Francis knew each other so well. It wasn't a question of time. She broke off She could not see his face The fields outside beyond the lawns were damp and melancholy in the dusk. She thought she heard the trees dripping, but there were no leaves left on the branches. It must be a damp piece of wood on the fire The shadows crept through the room and she knew the house was full of them, all the long corridors and the rooms upstairs—Godfrey's room and David's They held some menace for her and for Francis.

'I know of course it may be difficult.' She spoke slowly trying to show him that she understood, that she would be patient and calm, endlessly patient All that she had to give would be Francis' now. There was no one to share it with since Godfrey and David were dead She would keep faith with them and seven million dead men, being endlessly patient with Francis She filled the rooms upstairs which had been so cold and empty and full of shadows, lighting them with her love for Francis, confused with her love for her dead brothers for whom she could do nothing now.

She knew that it might not be easy at first, for him coming

back And that he had been through so much, and had been a prisoner. The word in Cynthia's voice seemed to set all the shadows trembling with her knowledge of what that meant —to be a prisoner. She had not realised fully a little while before, but Maurice had come to teach her. And she was quick, learning because of her love. And she was so fortunate (she felt the shadows in David's room and Godfrey's and wondered if Stella who was out riding, would come in before it was dark. Stella must be lonely for a time, until she found someone . . . as she had Francis). She was so fortunate that she must be patient, not expecting it to be easy at once.

She had meant to be at Heystead when he came, but she was suddenly frightened of Heystead where the woods grew closer round the house than at Winds and the fields in front were grey and wet and sad in the winter weather. Heystead would have the feeling still of a hospital and she would not have time to drive the darkness away, warming and lighting it for Francis. She could not confess to anyone her sudden terror of a winter evening and the shadows closing in and the woods darkening the house, and she and Francis left alone at Heystead together.

'You must come soon,' she said to Maurice Liddell. 'Suggest yourself. Francis will want so much to see you.' He would come soon, he assured her, without looking at her. They only felt for each other in the dusk with the common knowledge between them, like soldiers passing other soldiers whose faces they had never seen. 'And how are things up there now, chum?'

He would come soon, he said, and be as glad to see Francis at least as Francis could be to see him. And he thought. There aren't so many of us left, and he'll find it lonely at first, Francis will. And he didn't suppose he could have the least idea of how many went west that day.

They felt for each other and found each other so surely, so securely, that they could each read the other's thoughts.

He knew, when in a wild moment, she thought of asking him to stay when Francis came, to help her. He knew and she did, at once, that this was something that must be done alone. Only Stella could help her a little. It would be afternoon. Stella would go out for a walk or a ride, taking the dogs—but not Sam. They could not cheat Sam of one moment of joy.

'Perhaps,' she said, as though they had been following a train of thought together. 'Sam may have forgotten He's not as quick as he was. Growing old. It is too soon for Sam to grow old.'

The dog lay in the firelight at her feet, his eyes open. He did not stir or move when she spoke his name. That puzzled her and troubled her a little. Sam was growing old. (Sam had not heard, staring into the fire and seeing the wet turnip fields on a winter afternoon and Francis' legs above the leaves, and listening and straining for something he must hear, and hearing nothing.)

Stella thought she might go and stay with Mary for a bit, or with Aunt Nancy. And she faltered, staring at a road before her that seemed to lead nowhere—the Ladies' Road. Cynthia surely wouldn't want her when Francis came home. A long time ago the War Office had found proof that Second Lieutenant David Mannerling had been killed in the German attack on the 26th of May, and the official confirmation had come. But no one had found David's body or knew where he was buried, and Stella had a fantastic idea that she might still find him if she could go along the Ladies' Road, searching it. But Cynthia wanted her and asking her to stay, her voice told something. Stella thought, 'She's frightened,' and she could have gone close to Cynthia and taken her hands and held them. But she was shut out as though she had been in prison for three years and there lay between them an experience unshared, a chasm never to be bridged. She sat with her hands cold and empty in her lap, and said, of course, she would stay. And she didn't want

to leave Cynthia or Winds And she could go no closer to her, because Francis had come, shutting her out

Riding down the avenue a week later, she thought : 'Francis is in the train by now,' and looking back, thought she saw Cynthia's face at the window. Cynthia had said : 'You won't be too late It gets dark soon,' almost as though she panted for her return.

Stella didn't mind the dark. She had thought, she said, of going over to Avening for tea. Marcia had come back from her hospital work and John was always glad to see people. He could do so little with his one leg and he couldn't get used to the wooden one, Marcia said. It hurt him because the flesh hadn't hardened yet. She looked back at Cynthia as the army mare she was riding, moved impatiently. She would lose the mare soon now that the War was over, and she was making the most of her, having her altogether while the General was on leave Cynthia wouldn't want her back too soon, she conveyed silently. She looked between Peggy's ears But she might come back and have tea with Nanny in the nursery.

So long as she came back, Cynthia said, and Stella rode away down the avenue with the terriers behind her. They flashed in and out of the woods, their white coats showing in the grey light of the winter afternoon. Peggy stepped in a hole, stumbled and recovered herself. The avenue was pretty bad, Stella thought, looking down. The lorries bringing hay for the army horses in the stables had gone through it more than once. She wondered how Francis would find it all Turning, she rode under a tree, bending her head, came to a gate and got Peggy alongside it after some difficulty. She opened it and pushed it shut again The sound of it closing, was full of associations which the field showing before her grey and darkening a little already, shared. It was a wide field with a stone wall bordering it. The stone wall was the colour of the house which she could see as she looked back. The drawing-room windows showed firelight

and firelight flickered upstairs too. Cynthia would pile the fires high to warm Francis when he came home.

Stella rode slowly up the field. The dogs had gone away from her in a small pack, hunting. They had all got out of hand, she thought, and she wondered if Francis shouting at them would reduce them to obedience at once. It was true, although she hated to acknowledge it, that dogs obeyed a man better than a woman. She trotted a little. She felt lazy and Peggy suited herself to her mood. Ordinarily she pulled and danced, feeling the grass beneath her feet. Stella thought, 'Francis is in the train by now. I wonder what he's thinking of it,' and the fields about her lying cold and grey in the winter light seemed unfamiliar as they must seem to Francis. She had associated them with a part of her life now ended. And their familiar faces looked back at her as strangers.

She saw the wall ahead of her and woke Peggy up, putting her at a gap where someone else had gone over. She heard the scramble of Peggy's hoofs under her over the stones. She skirted a ploughed field and came out on to the road which was muddy with yellow pools catching the reflection of the sky. It was a country road running from village to village, hardly affected as yet by motor traffic. Peggy's feet splashed peacefully into the mud and out again.

They made a round and turned homeward as the dusk was falling. The stone wall they had jumped, showed as they went by the field again, a deeper grey; a wet yellow sunset was reflected in the lake, and the trees about it were black. The windows of the house beyond the pale avenue, were rosy, lit up, because Francis had come home.

Stella turned Peggy on to the grass beyond the lake. The mare's feet fell softly with a suggestion of stealth. As though she guessed Stella's desire to creep in unheard, she walked delicately, leaving the grass, into the stable yard. Her hoofs might have been muffled, and in the yard she turned her head and looked at her rider in the dusk. Stella,

dismounting, and leading her through the black door of the stable, felt a sense of unreality as though she and Peggy had died in some world that had ended long ago, a familiar world they had both known. And so they crept back over darkening fields up the pale avenue and into the yard full of shadows on a winter afternoon, a ghostly mare with a ghostly rider, and no one heard them or saw them come.

But in the stable every smell, every sound, was associated with rides with David, and the terriers moving about the oat box which held fascinating smells, flashed white in the dimness as they moved and were no ghostly dogs.

She went in through the kitchen walking stealthily and upstairs to the nursery. The drawing-room door was closed when she passed. She could hear no sound. But Francis and Cynthia were in there (unless Francis was late and had not come yet), and she was shut outside.

She stood at the door of the old nursery and looked at Nanny sewing by the fire, holding her work to the lamp, her eyes close to it. It was such a strain to see and she was so absorbed in it that she did not hear Stella come in. The nursery was full of firelight and the curtains were drawn, shutting out the damp grey fields deepening in the dusk. The firelight and lamplight on the curtains turned them rosy. A kettle boiling for Nanny's tea sang cheerfully. For a moment Stella had thought it was the bees humming. But they went to sleep in winter. She listened, straining her ears. What if they should have gone away? It foretold ill luck to a house when the bees left it. She could hear nothing except the kettle and the creak of Nanny's chair as she strained closer towards the light.

She said, 'Has Francis come home?' Nanny moved quickly and peered at her.

'You startled me, Stella. I didn't see you. Are you cold, my lamb? It's a wet, sad afternoon.'

'But nice in here,' Stella said, and her voice broke a

little 'You can't think how comfortable you look, Nanny, you and Pussy.' She teased the black cat curled up on the hearth, a descendant of the cat that had been there in her childhood. 'Does Pussy ever go out and take the air? She's getting fat.'

'If she went hunting, she'd maybe go down a rabbit hole,' Nanny said, pushing her needle in and out of a hole. Captain Seymour had come, she said, her voice somehow making peace of this disturbing home-coming. And he and Miss Cynthia were having tea downstairs

'And may I have tea with you?' Stella hurt her wet eyes, staring at the fire 'And have sugar bread and butter which David and I always loved.'

'Yes, the kettle's just boiling' She put her work away and peered at Stella 'There, there, my lamb,' she said. Day after day she sat here sewing, and the kettle hissed and the lazy cat purred, staring into the fire, and she thought of Godfrey and David, but mostly of David whom she had loved best of all of them.

'Miss Cynthia and Captain Seymour will have such a lot to say,' she said, bending to lift the kettle, her face and her glasses rosy in the firelight. 'Such a lot to say after all this time'

Downstairs, the parlourmaid brought tea and set it by Cynthia and said, should she light the lamps, and Cynthia said no very quickly, and the door closed, leaving the room in firelight and across the tea-table she faced a stranger who was her husband. The firelight turned the white cloth to flame colour, and made the kettle and the teapot gleam wonderfully. It threw shadows over Cynthia's face and hair. He wished he could come nearer to her and touch her hair, but he was awkward and shy in the presence of this beautiful stranger, and he felt clumsy staring at his large red hands, not knowing what to do with them. They had grown large and clumsy in the Army and in prison. A dog scratched at the door and she remembered Sam with

immense relief. But it was not Sam. Godfrey's old terrier Jack crept in half blind, and made one of the only two mistakes he had ever made in his life. He had never done it before, she panted. She couldn't think why now . . . and Jack quivered, turning blind eyes jewelled in the firelight, from one to another, thinking Godfrey had come home.

'The smell must be the same,' Francis said. 'Poor old fellow. He could hardly remember me at all.' And, hearing his voice, the dog turned quickly, the trouble showing in his face. He smelt legs and boots going slowly upwards, and knew, suddenly,

'Poor old chap,' Francis said softly. 'I'd bring him back for you; Jack, if I could.' The room was full of the dog's tragedy and in the middle of it, Sam pushed open the door that had been left ajar and knew at once, leaping on his master, conveying his joy. Jack left outside, crept away to a cold corner of the room and lay down with his head on his paws, his blind eyes beyond the firelight, dark and cold.

'I have never known him to make a mistake before,' Cynthia said. Francis sat with Sam's head on his knees and his eyes and the dog's met. Sam had so much to tell him and there was so much to do. The yellow fields of stubble grass the blue-green turnip leaves, cold under a winter sky. The pond at dusk or twilight when frost came bringing in the duck. Sam stood in ice-cold water under a snow sky quivering, and waiting, and did not discover that he had heard nothing, telling Francis all there was for them to do. And Jack lay in the coldest corner of the room, his head on his paws, his eyes wide, thinking of Godfrey. Presently the kettle boiled and Cynthia made the tea with cold, awkward fingers while across Sam's head pressed between his knees, Francis watched her half shyly and humbly, thinking how beautiful her hands were, moving about the cups. He leaned forward watching her in that bewildered way, and took the cup from her hand and

hardly knew what to do with it. Over the tea they talked with appalling politeness. She asked him if he had had a good journey. And was the train late? Oh, punctual. And she said politely that that was a good train. And he agreed with equal politeness that it was a good train. For three years he had starved for her and for this hour, his hunger making every day of the three years, hell.

'A good train,' he repeated as though it was important. And he had had a good journey. And he stroked Sam's soft head which was pressed against his knees comfortingly. But away in the cold shadows Jack stirred and sighed, and the room was full of pain and of their experiences unshared in this time when they had been growing without each other and away from each other, as though they travelled on different roads. They met desperately over a cup, the fragility of which held a terrible significance, asking each other if they took sugar in their tea.

Chapter 22

CYNTHIA moved with Francis to Heystead and lit fires in all the rooms and opened all the windows wide. The cold winter air came in from outside, but the house still seemed to smell like a hospital and to have the feeling of one. It would pass in time, she thought, standing in the long room which had been the nursery. Or she imagined it perhaps. The smell, the feeling, were, in her own memory. Stella was at Winds with Mary and Michael. Later there would be so much to do and arrange and settle, but they had no energy for it yet. After Christmas, which Cynthia said they must all spend at Heystead. She would have got rid of the hospital smell then and the feeling had gone already. Stella, staying at Heystead for a few days, thought that it would never quite go. The house had held pain and it still held pain. She stood in the drawing-room which Cynthia had made charming with new curtains and chintz covers and thought all this and the fire-light and the lamplight and the tea-table ought to have driven away that other feeling. Cynthia said that there was a lot to be done and discussed, but they could wait until after Christmas when Francis had had a long rest. Stella knew then. They were all depending on Francis, the one man left in the family and Francis was trying to take up life again with groping clumsy fingers. She remembered Cynthia saying in a rare moment of weakness, faltering, 'If only we had Francis,' and 'When Francis comes home.' All the months he was away, he must to Cynthia wanting him, have seemed stronger and stronger, bigger and bigger. Everything would be all right when Francis came home. But Francis, staring at his own fields which had become unfamiliar, fumbling in his own stables with hands that had grown clumsy doing accustomed things

wasn't ready yet. After Christmas when he had had a long rest.

For Francis wasn't nearly well yet. And Stella thought, understanding him almost better than Cynthia because Cynthia had watched him too long, that it might take some time.

Someone came to tea one of those days whom they had always known—Mrs. Oliver who lived an almost equal distance between Heystead and Winds Stella was washing stockings in the bathroom (she spent half her life washing stockings now, it seemed), and saw her arrive. She thought bother, she would have to go down. Then she heard Francis' voice. Francis had met the visitor on the steps. They were going into the house together. Stella finished her stockings and took them to the linen room and hung them out carefully to dry. Then she went to her own room and combed her hair and powdered her nose (it was odd how the shine would show through, however much powder she put on), and went downstairs. Mrs. Oliver whom they all liked, was sitting by the fire talking to Francis. One of Cynthia's Sealyhams showed his approval of her by sitting bolt upright, pressed back against her knees, staring into the fire. Francis was talking, and Stella stood at the door thinking with a little shock, 'He looks quite happy.' He was talking easily. As Stella stood there he laughed, stooping to push one of the Sealyhams away from the fire.

The room looked very peaceful in the firelight. Stella thought at once that Francis must have seen it like this, often and often in that prison camp. He had said vaguely that he had put off doing everything until he came home. He hadn't been able to read there, or write, except to Cynthia. One had thought of all the things one would do when one got home, he had said, where there would be tables and fires. And he had laughed a little, standing by the fire at Heystead, and Stella had known somehow

that though there had been tables and fires, it hadn't come up to his dream. And even this room which he must have seen often, hadn't been quite what he expected. It was like that when people came home. It was awful, she thought, when people came home after a long time. But one couldn't have known that. They had, none of them, had any idea, counting the days until Francis came. But he seemed happy enough now, talking easily to Mrs. Oliver whose rosy kind old face was turned to the firelight. And then Cynthia came in beside Stella and a maid followed them with tea, and Cynthia sat down just beyond the firelight and poured out the tea. Francis handed it to Mrs. Oliver rather clumsily and he apologised. He had got out of this sort of thing, he said, and hadn't got into training again yet. Stella hearing him laugh—as though that was all he had to get back to—knelt to pick up the hot cakes which were keeping warm in a china dish in the fender. She kept her face hidden. She could not, she thought, kneeling there among the dogs, a soft body which she had pushed away, pressed back unresentfully against her, look at Cynthia. No one, she prayed, would look at Cynthia. She fumbled with the hot cakes stupidly, endlessly, and the soft body pressed against her knee moved and a head came to take its place. She could have put her hands about the dog's neck and strangled it for its stupidity in sudden fury. They were all the same, only wanting a fire and food and walks, someone's knee or foot to put their heads on and that was all they cared about. She turned suddenly, not far enough to catch Cynthia's face, and saw Sam's melancholy eyes watching her. She thought, with a little shock, that Sam knew. He lay hour after hour shut away with his deafness, watching Francis, his eyes quick with the lost sense making them quicker. She and Sam knew. Only she and Sam knew being outside. And even to them nothing was clear. Nothing except Mrs. Oliver's voice in the room behind Stella. Only old

people talked like that, clear, unfaltering, being sure of everything.

'Well, Cynthia,' she was saying, 'they can't have treated Francis too badly. I must say prison has agreed with him.'

The words were left in the room when she had said them, filling an appalling silence. Sam, Stella thought, had not moved or sighed. Sam wouldn't, knowing everything. She heard Cynthia: 'You think so, Mrs. Oliver?' Stella fumbled helplessly with the dish of hot cakes. She thought: 'Cynthia's feeling sick,' and felt sick herself.

Francis said, 'I'm very fit,' and Stella turned quickly and saw him smiling at Mrs. Oliver in an easy, friendly way. She couldn't look at Cynthia and the china dish in her hand crashed suddenly.

She stooped to pick up the bits, laughing rather hysterically. It was too much for the dogs who came awake seeing the cakes scattered surely for their benefit. She pushed their noses away, aware that Sam had not moved. Francis and Cynthia stooped to help her. She thought, if Mrs. Oliver started again she would have to drop all the plates one by one, to stop her. What would they think? Only that she was growing. She was growing—clumsier and clumsier, she thought. Cynthia wouldn't understand or Francis. No one in this room would know why she did it, except Sam. She sat back on her heels with a plate in her hand, the rescued cakes piled on it. 'These didn't fall in the grate,' she said, smiling at Mrs. Oliver diffidently and imploringly.

'I wouldn't mind if they had,' the old lady said, cheerfully taking one. She talked of other things Francis was going to hunt, wasn't he? And Cynthia. Stella sat on her heels by the fire, a dog's body pressed against her knee, and met Sam's eyes. It was all right now, she assured him. When people like Mrs. Oliver got on to hunting, you were safe. She wouldn't have to break any more plates.

That winter Captain Goff came to Winds to talk about David. He had come to Winds to stay before, but Stella hardly remembered him among so many. And he had been Godfrey's friend and was still Mary's. She hardly remembered that. To her he was Captain Goff whom David had mentioned in his letters, although he had talked more of Severn. And he had been taken prisoner that morning in May when David had been reported Missing.

Goff thought, coming on this errand and having little liking for it, that this was Severn's job, damn him—even though he Goff, had been Godfrey's friend. He and Severn had disliked each other, because they had too much in common. He said vaguely sitting in the drawing-room at Winds looking down at his hands which seemed to him clumsy and awkward as Francis' had seemed to him, that he had thought they would have heard from Severn. For Severn, he said, looking up suddenly, and meeting Stella's eyes, had known David better than any of them. And then he couldn't think of anything else to say, wondering about Mary and when she would come in.

Stella poked the fire, not seeming to look at him. But when he stared down at his hands like that, she could have a good long look, storing and remembering everything. She knelt by the fire, her face turned away from him. Mary would be coming in presently, she said. She had had to go out unexpectedly. And she poked the fire, telling him unless he was too stupid to understand (having been a prisoner which might mean that he was as stupid as Francis) that David belonged to her. And it must be hard for him to remember, but if he could. And she sat back on her heels and looked up at him and he started a little.

'You're like your young brother, you know,' he said quite simply.

That was better. She looked at him with clear eyes as she had looked at David, telling him that there was nothing he need save her, assuring him of her companionship, her

full understanding. The things David had shared with her, the things they had learned together, seeing them with no shadows over their eyes. None of these things could possibly happen to them. . . . Everyone in the War knew that. . . .

But they had happened to Godfrey and David. She blinked suddenly, burning her face beside the fire, watching this stupid man who had so much to tell, and sat with the minutes ticking away, saying nothing. She said softly, 'Yes, I know. We were always told that.' And she looked at David's photograph which was only a photograph. She turned away. She would not look at it yet, losing David's face altogether that way.

She told him, as though she was explaining, making it clear to him that David belonged to her, that Cynthia was married and that Godfrey of course he knew had been killed early in the War, and there had just been four of them, their father and mother having died long ago when they were children. And when she said that, that there had been the four of them but she and David being younger had done everything together, she looked at him and the shadow lay over her face darkening it as it lay over Cynthia's these days watching Francis. (Nothing was real to Cynthia in a world of shadows except Francis' breathing at night, the assurance that he was there and had come home.) He thought again, 'How like she is,' seeing David's face with the candlelight throwing a shadow on it, before he went out for his last turn on watch. The shadow hid something which he could not fully understand, their love for Winds and for each other, and all that they had lost.

But now, they both thought, it's all much easier. For they understood each other at least, speaking in a common language even if they could not always see each other in the dark. 'Who are you, chum? . . .' 'So and so, N'th Division. Who are you?' 'And how are things up there now? . . . Good-bye, chum.'

He told her Severn ought to have come, but he forgot things Ever since that show in May. And though that was all he said, the room with firelight and late chrysanthemums in bowls about it, and Jack who was not deceived again, lying on the hearth, was full of the horror of that morning in May. For Severn surely, he thought, had seen him last, being his Company Commander But Severn with whom he had been in prison all these months remembered nothing; sometimes indeed seemed to forget that show altogether, although Goff didn't see, staring down at the ground, how he could forget. But he was remembering that he had spoken to Severn in that prison camp where their common experience drew them together although they had once avoided each other because of it, about young Mannering. And Severn seemed to remember him with difficulty and to have forgotten that he had been killed.

He looked up, smelling the wood fire and the chrysanthemums and stared at a pink bowl of them in the window against the grey winter light outside. 'We used to cut wood sometimes,' he said, 'in prison. Officers didn't have to work but it was something to do. We thought we'd spend the winter there and that the War would end next spring when the Americans really got going'

Yes, she said. They had all thought that. David had been afraid he would never get there, but there had been no need for that fear. And she forced him back to David and that morning in May. She knew about Captain Severn, she said. David had mentioned him in his letters.

'He didn't mention me?'

She puckered her forehead a little. She thought once or twice. When they were at some village digging trenches. Of course she remembered him at Godfrey's and Mary's house in London. And he had come to Winds, once, hadn't he? She stared at him trying to remember him among so many.

'That village.' He went back to it. 'Boisville . . .'

'Ah,' she repeated it, remembering it. She remembered too what it was that David had written about Goff. He couldn't talk much sense about the War, but knew lots about hunting. It didn't really matter, she said. 'We didn't know any names you see. I never heard the name of that village before. And other places he went to.'

She stared at him and he knew that she was trying to find the way, that she looked to him to help her, for those nameless villages and towns—or the sites where villages and towns had once been—where David had spent the last months of his life made that life seem unreal, intangible, as though David had already slipped into another world, a world which had no name for her to find it by.

'You used to dig trenches,' she said. 'Through cornfields and a meadow and through woods.'

He made a quick movement leaning back with his face in shadow so that she could not see it. It was growing dark outside, the cold dark of a December evening, but all the firelit room was full of the horror of that wood fighting in May.

He hadn't known David very well, he said, or very long. Not as Severn had known him. He broke off. He had once hated Severn, but he couldn't afford to hate him now when they were left alone with their common experience. He might go up and down a tape in the dark, passing ghosts who did not answer his call. 'Who are you, chum?' only turning ghostly faces to him to show that they were dead men and passing on Millions of them; men he had seen dead and dying in some wood. It had been spring then, he said, talking to Mannering's sister in the pleasant firelit room. And he had met young Mannering (he called him David with difficulty never having known him by his Christian name), at Boisville digging trenches. They were a B Division then and their battalion had been pretty badly knocked about on the 21st of March. Severn was there—a

queer place to find Severn who had still liked the War. But the rest of them, he said, weren't in a hurry.

Perhaps she had asked him a question. 'How did you feel?' because she must learn so much even if she tortured him learning, and he answered: 'Well—we were not in a hurry,' and the simple phrase conveyed everything about that battalion that had been so badly smashed on the 21st of March. 'You could tell that by looking at them,' he said. They had thought that they had done with the War.

They knew vaguely what had happened, now, he explained, but they hadn't, of course, known then. That front had been quiet for a year, a whole year. It seemed incredible. The quietness frightened the old soldiers when they took over. He broke off. The wood fire spluttered a little. Jack stirred, opened half-blind eyes and slept again. Goff seemed to be listening, waiting for something to break that quietness which held menace and fear for old soldiers who knew. She sat forward, looking at him in the firelight with David's face, and went with him into unfamiliar trenches where old soldiers crept about exploring, half afraid; stopping now and again to listen. 'It's quiet over there. Jerry must be up to something', listening, straining, for some normal sound, something that they understood, until they almost longed for the sound of a solitary shell sent over to remind them that the War was still going on, or the slow rat-tat-tat of German machine-guns.

They had taken over from French troops. Going up, they had seen unfamiliar uniforms, the light neat helmets outlined against the sky as men passed them, going down. They were homesick already, frightened and hungry for things they knew, the sound of 'Mother' the big railway gun spitting out shells somewhere up near Hazebrouck, even the answering noise from German guns. They made an attempt with ghostly figures filing past them in the dark. 'Things bon? Trenches good, eh?' A voice answered and passed by. 'Quiet enough, my friend. Nothing ever happens

up there. We just sit and wait.' (One waits always, was what they said.)

They waited; in unfamiliar trenches, comfortless even beside the discomfort of British trenches. 'And they haven't left us much.' Young soldiers, of course, Goff explained, didn't mind the quietness although it was unexpected. But to the old soldiers it was sinister. They could not believe that it had been like that for months and months. Jerry must be up to something. And while the young soldiers thought it wasn't nearly as bad as people made out, the older men waited in those unfamiliar trenches for something to happen.

David never knew, she said. Other people wrote last letters and left them to be posted in case they were killed. But David's last letter held no hint of it. And it wasn't true that people knew when they were going to be killed. (She thought of Jim Humphreys who, she was sure, hadn't known.) If David had written any last letter it had been lost in the confusion.

He was sure David hadn't written. There was no time. 'We only knew in the middle of the night.' He said. 'And they started sending over gas shells at one. They had been preparing ever since the spring came, bringing up supplies under cover of the woods. It was wonderful after the desolation up north.' He thought that might have frightened the old soldiers if they had known, what the woods, beautiful in May, hid.

He thought David must have been killed almost at once. They had stood to arms to meet the attack, but it was hopeless from the first. And after the gas came over, he hadn't known much more until, a long time after, he and Severn were going back into Germany as prisoners. The queerest stroke of fate in the world, he said, that should make Severn a prisoner. He tried to escape once on the way down, but they got him. And it was queer that David should have been killed in his first show almost, and old

soldiers as he and Severn were, should be taken prisoner. And he couldn't say how sorry he was. . . . He sat silent thinking of the foliage of woods in May, green leafy screens spread out to hide ammunition dumps and guns. And looking up he saw the bare branches of the trees outside against the wintry sky and they seemed kind and friendly.

He stayed the night after all. He was due to rejoin his battalion in Germany in a week or so and he didn't say again that he must get back to London at once because he had so much to do. The battalion was billeted in a village outside Cologne, in good country, someone wrote to him, surrounded by woods. Severn was there, still thinking the War had ended a bit too soon. He had had a plan for escape and getting to the frontier hiding in German woods in the daytime while the autumn leaves still made cover. The War ending before his plans were ready had set him free, but he had been a prisoner, and once at least, he and Goff had looked at each other as prisoners look. Their battalion had marched into Germany without them and Severn was not likely to forget the bitterness of that. And now they were stationed there and one of these days they would see the spring come in some German wood.

Mary came in and said, 'Hello, Alan,' as if they knew each other so well that there was nothing else to say. And then they talked of other things. He said, 'Yes,' he would be glad to get back in a way. And he couldn't have explained why the battalion in which only Severn was left now of the men he had known, represented to him the nearest thing in the world to home.

He had a small house and estate in the Midlands and he had gone there as soon as he got his leave and had looked at his own fields as Francis Seymour had looked at his, finding them unfamiliar. Later, of course, he meant to come back and settle down, farm a bit and hunt a bit. He walked over the fields, grey-brown in the winter light.

with here and there a wet strip where the rain had left floods. He heard the water squelch in his boots and he was going along the duckboard again, or up to the line in the dark, the mud squelching horribly. He found the long field where he had learned to ride and the spinney edging it, dark brown with the close-packed winter trees. Following the path where he had known every mound, every hole which might trap a pony's feet, he came to the gate at the end and leaned over, looking into pasture fields broken by small brown coppices.

They looked back at him, fading in the light of the winter afternoon. They were unfamiliar as though he had come, a stranger, pretending they were his. Yet as a child, as a boy, he had ridden his pony down the long field through the gate and down the slope to the covert, playing at fox hunting alone. He had found a gap in the wall about the covert and scrambled over it, riding between the trees which, in his memory were wet, dripping on his face. He had listened, pretending he heard the hunt going away the other side, the hounds streaming across country. He had made hunting noises and been terrified at once lest anyone should hear. But the woods throwing back the echo of his voice had been quiet afterwards. Only the December trees dripping as they dripped now against his face. And he had ridden through them, playing the games of a lonely child and a lonely boy.

He went the same way now on foot, through the cover and came out into the stubble field beyond. Always, there was the feeling of looking for something he could not find, coming almost up with it, and always seeing it fade away gently out of his reach. Cutting across country to the house, he saw it unlit and gloomy set amid these sad fields. He had not known before that they were sad, and that all the woods dripped with damp, and that there were too many of them in this country. The hall was dark when he opened the door and went in. The house half empty for so long,

felt damp. The smell reminded him only faintly of the smell of a dug-out. His housekeeper who was growing old, brought lights with a little flutter of apology. The wood fire in the library which was the only room he used for those few days had gone low. The wood smouldered as though it was wet. Too new, he thought, turning a log with his foot, and was oddly comforted by the assurance of so much knowledge, giving him a faint security. A little later when he could settle things he might come back and farm a bit and do whatever the house needed to it. Cut down a few trees. They could spare them. And fill the wood house with them so that next year they'd be dry. The old house-keeper brought the tea tray, blew the damp logs to something like a flame, and pulled the curtains. With the lamp lit, the room was suddenly cheerful. He ate home-made jam with Mrs Stephens' home-made bread and enjoyed it. He looked up to congratulate her.

It hadn't been easy, she said, with no sugar. But next year there'd be plenty of sugar. And he'd be home perhaps. He didn't answer her, and she faded away out of the door, as the woods and fields had seemed to fade before him, and something that he was looking for, always just beyond his reach going away from him as he came up with it.

He thought of that visit to his home, at Winds which was just the sort of house he thought, that young Mannering would have grown up in. He associated the house more with David than with Godfrey whom he had known outside it. He sat at dinner remembering, sitting back a little out of the candlelight in the softness of the shadows. He had apologised for dining as he was as earlier he had protested that he could not stay the night, having no luggage. But he and Godfrey were of a size, Mary said looking at him as though she measured him beside the dead man. They had worn each other's clothes before, of course, she added, remembering. And they could supply him with things for the night. He thanked her . . . not looking at her

. . . and it was good of her. And he thought of all the dead men's beds and clothes he had used, and they passed him, ghostly figures going down in the dark, not turning their faces so that he could recognise them, not answering his call.

Talking at dinner, he supposed that when their turn in the Occupation was over, the battalion would be sent abroad. And he thought of sunlight and colour in some unfamiliar foreign land and longed for it.

Stella sat silent, leaving him to talk to Mary, and wished the time would not pass so quickly, because to-morrow he would be gone, taking with him the faint smell and all its associations of his uniform, the creak of his field boots which were rather beautiful, and the glimmer in the candle-light of the three stars on his shoulder.

Chapter 23

THEY established something at least before he went Cynthia at Heystead, was getting ready for Christmas which would be less terrible there than at Winds, for Heystead held no memories for any of them except Francis. She lit fires and opened windows and hung new curtains and the winter air coming in across the cold fields seemed somehow to catch the smell of anaesthetics as soon as it came in. It wasn't possible, and it must only be that the smell was still in her nostrils, but it would go by degrees and she piled the fires higher waiting for Francis, who in the fields, or in the stables, was doing the things he had done five years ago with oddly clumsy hands. The stables, all their shadows warm with horses' breathing, were comforting. He slipped into them and they closed behind him and his own horse which he had been able to buy back from the Army stirred in his stall, hearing him come. He turned his head, and Francis, with his hand on his neck, thought of the hunting days they'd have together when they were both fit again.

He whispered something about them to Jupiter and Jupiter whispered back, his soft nose against Francis' coat. He dreamed perhaps of brown fields and clear winter air and hounds crying and the brown fields changing to green turf under him. Or only of splashing home through a muddy lane with Francis. His horse's limited memory was confused by the time he had spent as an officer's charger, and perhaps he remembered nothing. But Sam nosing about the stall, in and out between Jupiter's legs remembered everything. He left Francis in the stables and went in and scratched at the drawing-room door and he and Cynthia waited there together for Francis. He lay in the firelight, his head against Cynthia's foot, dimly feeling her

trouble which he shared, a vague unformed trouble about Francis which made him sigh sometimes as he slept.

Cynthia at Heystead, Stella knew, was altogether absorbed in Francis. And Mary at Winds walked with Michael and played with him and taught him new words and Michael, Stella thought, grew more and more like his mother, and less and less like Godfrey, so that one day there would be no likeness at all. She thought that must be so because Godfrey was dead and Michael couldn't grow like him unconsciously, learning from him. Whatever Godfrey had left would grow fainter and fainter with the years.

Alan Goff stayed the next day, into the late afternoon. Vaguely, he was aware of some need of him, of something he should do. And he was sorry for Stella because David had been killed and they had done everything together.

She drove him to the station and turned the engine off and sat in the dusk, waiting for the train to be signalled. She looked at him quickly and looked away again. Soon the train would come and he would go away in it taking with him the association of his uniform and all that that meant.

She said, 'It was very good of you to come,' thanking him formally, and a far-distant train whistling, brought her heart into her mouth. The red light did not change to green, and they waited, talking in the dusk. He said he had been very glad to come.

'I suppose it will be a long time before you get any more leave.' She watched the red light until it hurt her eyes, shut them and opened them again. (Would it have turned green? . . . no. They must have been early.)

Some time, he thought There'd be a lot of tidying up.

And presently he'd be going abroad, she said, trying to show how little she minded. That would be nice, she said, almost joyously, playing with the wheel in front of her

It would be, he said in a relieved sort of way. He didn't

feel somehow at home in England. (People had always said that but more forcibly when they came back from leave.) And it would be pleasant to travel in peace conditions and see a bit of the world. The light before them turned green and he moved. (He thought of a Very light showing an S O S to the artillery) She heard the creak of his boots and his belt, all the leather he wore.

He supposed he'd better be moving and he stood beside the car, looking at her. She got out and walked with him towards the station. The train was signalled from Coombe, she said, a long way away. He needn't hurry. And she stood still for a moment. She could only see him dimly, smell the leather, catch the glimpse of the rank badge on his shoulder. 'If you come on leave you will let us know,' she said.

He answered yes, of course, in a rather surprised man's way, because things that men take for granted women must have definitely put into words. Mary always knew where he was, he said. And she said she was going back to London almost at once and he'd be seeing her there often.

The signal lights flickering in the wind made strange bright arrows. 'Yes,' Stella said, wincing as one of them struck her. That would be very nice.

He and Godfrey, he explained hastily, lest the train coming should interrupt, had been in the same battalion of course, even before the War until Godfrey got that job at the War Office, and he had been hit when Godfrey was killed.

He didn't spare her, Stella thought, and wondered if he would have said that to Mary. Did he feel that Godfrey was Mary's and forget Stella's sisterhood? But David was hers she thought jealously.

And Godfrey and Mary, he said walking towards the lit door of the small station building, had been his best friends. He stared in front of him at the lit door. It seemed a long time ago now, since Godfrey had been killed and a

lot of other good fellows, and only he and Severn were left with a few dug-out senior officers who had spent the duration in England.

He got his ticket and turned back to her. He would be seeing her perhaps with Mary in town. He looked down at the ticket in his hand rather stupidly. He was confused between them for a moment because he had come to see them both on the same errand. But it was a long time now since Godfrey had been killed in France. And he didn't really understand, Stella knew hopelessly, watching him. Men were like that. They only understood the relationships they created. It was part of their vanity. Husband and wife. You could get another husband. But she had lost two brothers.

She said politely, yes, she supposed she'd see him in London. And looked down the line in the direction from which the train would come. The light was green now. The wind was cold, hurting her eyes, making them water a little.

'Good-bye,' she said, holding out her hand as they heard the train coming.

It roared into the station and on again, taking him with it. Stella went out into the dusk, wound the car, and got into it. The wind made her eyes smart, driving against it. Putting the car into the garage at Winds she went in by the kitchen passage to the house. The drawing-room was empty in flickering firelight except for Jack lying on the hearth. He lifted his head and turned blind eyes towards her as she came in. His nose moved, one sense taking the place of the other. He thumped his tail faintly, smelling her. She sat down and called him to her, feeling suddenly a profound pity for the dog. He had given up hoping now that Godfrey would come back. He had always been a one-man dog, only caring really for Godfrey, although he came to her now and laid his head on her knees, sighing a little as she pulled his ears through her fingers and let them go.

The house was very quiet. Mary, she knew, at this hour

would be up with Michael in the nursery. She and Jack seemed to be left alone in the quietness, shut away together by some barrier that lay between them and the rest of the house. 'Poor Jack,' she said, and the dog watched her with blind eyes, not moving. His head laid on her knees, felt suddenly heavy as though he laid upon her the burden of his loss. She glanced at the gilt French clock on the chimneypiece. Mary would be putting Michael to bed. She wondered what Cynthia was doing at Heystead. Often she had looked at this clock wondering what David was doing now in France. But she wouldn't wonder about him any more. The firelit room made her feel a little sleepy. The dog's head on her knees became heavier and heavier like a burden laid upon her in sleep. Alan Goff was in the train now, and he would be seeing Mary next week. They all had someone, she thought, half asleep. Cynthia and Francis, Mary and Michael. And Mary had Captain Goff too. But Jack had lost Godfrey and she had lost David and there wasn't anyone else for either of them. She felt cold as though the fire had gone down and she had slept in a cold room. The dog's head on her knees became heavier and heavier until she seemed to be holding the weight of a dead body.

Chapter 24

A WEEK later Alan Goff left a foggy street, and still in fog, turned down a lane which had once led to a stable of a big London house. The stable was now a cottage and a light showed in the fog above a green door. He rang the bell. Mrs. Mannering was back? The maid said, yes She had come yesterday. He stepped in and left the fog behind him.

Mrs. Mannering would be down in a few minutes, the maid said, stirring the fire in the drawing-room, and turning on another light in case he should want to read the evening paper folded neatly on a table beside him.

He did not read the paper, having a feeling of detachment from the affairs of the world in which he had played an obscure part Now that part was played, and he felt as Nancy Creagh had felt, that he could slip from the main stream into a backwater, nothing more being asked of him.

He waited for Mary, standing with his back to the fire. This house which she had made herself seemed more her background than Winds. Perhaps it was only association because he had seen her more often here.

She said, coming in: 'Alan. It's nice to see you standing there.' which was exactly what she had thought.

'And what have you been doing?' she asked, stirring the fire as the maid had stirred it

'Waiting for you to come back,' he said and laughed watching her. He thought vaguely that it was an instinct with some women to stir fires whenever they saw them and he remembered the cold damp feeling of his own Manor House. If Mary went there, he thought, she would stir all the fires and the house would be warm, and wouldn't have any more the feeling and smell that reminded him of a dug-out.

'I only came yesterday,' she said smiling up at him. 'I am glad you came so soon.'

He had only come on chance, he said. Would she like to go out? She glanced towards the window and shivered. It was nicer in here, wasn't it? He looked about the room full of flowers and soft lights and the smell of the wood fire. Much nicer in here, he said. He had thought that, coming in from the fog and standing by the fire warming himself.

Waiting for her he had remembered inevitably the first time he had come after Godfrey had been killed, walking from his hotel because he had not the courage to go to this ordeal in a swift-moving taxi, and how he had turned out of the crowded war-time street into the quietness of the little lane and had seen the green door before him and had wished he were going over the top instead of doing this.

She had been to see him in hospital, but that had not seemed to break the shock of that first meeting here. He had been only half alive in hospital unable to realise anything fully. He had seen her black clothes against a sunlit window and she had looked tall, and too thin, an overgrown girl. He had forgotten Godfrey in his weakness, lying watching her. But when he was well again, and he went to see her she had been wonderful, knowing somehow and not despising him, holding his hand and pitying him for the errand on which he came.

'Poor Alan. How you must have dreaded it! Do I frighten you now?'

It was always between them, the memory of that errand on which he had once come. He recaptured it every time he walked up to the small green door with the quaint brass knocker which she had picked up somewhere. Every time he thought: 'Poor old Godfrey,' and trying to see Godfrey's face each time he realised that it was growing dimmer in his memory.

She left the fire and turned out the brightest lights so that they sat almost in firelight. 'Dinner will be ready in a

'moment,' she said 'I came in late. Would you like anything? There is a tray over there. Help yourself'

He helped himself. He could not but remember, lifting the decanter, seeing that same decanter in Godfrey's hands, hearing Godfrey: 'Say when, Alan.' He said, coming back to the fire with the glass in his hand, that it was cold and foggy outside.

'And England looks awful,' she said. 'Does it?' She leaned forward, watching him. He started a little. The amber liquid in his glass moved catching the firelight and was still again. 'Not in here,' he said, looking round the room and back to her. He had to remember even then how often during those weeks on the Somme, Godfrey must have seen this room, more often probably than he had seen the rooms at Winds. For a moment he stood with Godfrey, seeing it with Godfrey's eyes. He looked up, almost expecting to see Godfrey at the door. There was no one there. He stared down at his glass, remembering how Godfrey had died.

She watched him with a certain carefulness as though she were afraid to miss anything. His lids, dropped over his eyes, hid them from her. (She knew nothing of bayonet instructions. 'Go for a man's face because that'll make him shut his eyes')

'Oh, no, England wasn't awful in here,' he said. But because she knew anyhow, he laughed a little, and acknowledged, well, it was damp and cold; but so was France for that matter. And there'd be snow soon, he thought.

They dined together in the tiny dining-room which she had made charming. The table was not too big for two and he faced her across it, seeing her against the window curtains of beautiful blue and thought of her sitting here with Godfrey. There had been comfortable space for four at the round table, but there had often been three during the years of their friendship.

He talked of Winds afterwards in the drawing-room where he had waited for her, coming on the same errand, and the waiting had been worse than waiting in France to go over. She had been sewing but when he began to talk, she put her work away in a way of hers he knew, leaning forward to listen, as though she gave him all her thoughts, all of herself that was possible. She had always been like that, generous in her friendships, almost prodigal. He could not help thinking how she had loved Godfrey with that reckless generosity, pouring out everything so that some of it overflowed, but he did not think of that. He only thought of Godfrey in this room and the appalling contrast of the manner in which Godfrey had died. But that, he thought, she must never know, and he blinked as though someone had thrust a bayonet in his face, making him blind. He had stood before her that other day blinking like that while she tried to wring from him a thousand small details, unimportant to him, but infinitely precious to her. She had taken his hands and held them for a moment. 'You will tell me everything, Alan, for the sake of the friendship we had, you and I and Godfrey.' Her hands had been cold, holding his, then suddenly burning as though they were on fire. When he sat down he had put his own hands to his face for a moment. They seemed numb, without feeling.

'I will tell you everything, Mary,' he had lied. 'Only give me time.'

And she had thought at once how recently he had come from it, and that it was all over for Godfrey lying somewhere under a quiet sky. And she had been penitent, asking forgiveness because she had been making it harder for him, and God knew, she realised, it was hard enough. And he'd know the things she would want to know because of their friendship of three.

She said now, more than two years after. 'You've had more than your share of dead men's wives and sisters, my poor Alan.'

He looked up at her. It seemed hard on those kids, he said. That was all David had been. And the girl—his sister. And he wondered why he had found it easier to talk to her than to Mary. He did not discover that he had not spared her, that he had hidden nothing. She knew at least as much as he knew of the way in which in all probability David had died. She had had a way of sitting with brave eyes facing him and it. It wasn't any use trying to hide anything from those eyes, because she had grown up to the War and had always known.

He realised that vaguely. 'I suppose,' he said, feeling that Mary would understand better than he did. 'That those children remember nothing before the War.'

Not much, she agreed. But it was over now. And Stella had her life before her, and she was so young. She looked down at the work laid on her knee. It was a tiny baby's frock. She worked at a crèche for slum babies now and had left Michael for the moment at Winds where Nanny adored him. It was a lovely place for children to grow up, she said. And that mattered more than anything. Childhood. You could bear anything that happened afterwards if you had had that. A country childhood. But she had always been a Londoner and she couldn't, because of that, take Michael into the land of country knowledge as Cynthia or Stella could. And she stood outside Winds and outside the family, looking at them and even Michael was shut away from her, inside.

She talked to him about himself and his plans. She had always been a good listener when he had wanted to talk about himself in a man's way. It was less easy to get him to talk now. And when he was silent, she watched him and his face was less easy to read since he had been a prisoner. And she thanked God at least, that Godfrey lying somewhere under a quiet sky, had never been a prisoner.

She went with him to the little hall when he discovered how late it was. The servants had gone to bed. She watched

him put on his British Warm, and the shape of his shoulders, his back turned for a moment, made her catch her breath. She went suddenly white, but the light was too dim for him to see that. He stood in the doorway with the foggy night behind him, the little toy lantern hanging over his head. It threw strange shadows on his face. 'Go in,' he said. 'It's cold.'

'But warm in here,' she said, watching him curiously.

'It's always warm in here,' he agreed.

She searched his face which had for a moment a certain blank look, almost of stupidity. 'You'll remember that,' she said quickly. He stared at her stupidly. How could he forget?

'If you are cold ever.' She was suddenly frightened of something. 'Come here, Alan. I am nearly always here. But if I should be out, wait.'

'You are always here when I want you,' he said. 'It's one of the wonderful things about you.' But he thought—he'd be in Germany now for months, and abroad after that. And he shut the door and went down the narrow lane at the end of which the traffic roared, feeling that he had left her there with Godfrey. He hadn't felt that at Winds. The fog stirring a little as he looked back, showed him the small hanging lantern swung over the green door. He thought of Godfrey and of nights when they had sat together at dinner in the little dining-room, when they had talked a great deal and made wild plans and had laughed a great deal, he and Mary and Godfrey. And Mary had been reckless, generous with her love and her friendship. As he looked back, thinking of Godfrey, the little light in the hanging lantern went out, and the fog closed in about him

Chapter 25

STELLA stood in the yard at Heystead waiting for Francis. She wished he would hurry, for it was cold waiting here, even with several jerseys under the Burberry she wore. It had been sleet ing and it looked as if the sleet would turn to snow. She stood with her hands in her pockets, the collar of her coat turned up, but the cold ascended from the wet yard beneath her feet and the wind came between the stable buildings, damp and icy. She walked about a bit, wishing Francis would come. (Had he always been so slow?) The light would be going soon if he didn't hurry. She sank her face deeper into the collar of her coat. It was a man's Burberry and had been David's Sam, coming out of the house, as a door opened, smelt it curiously. 'Hullo, Sam Where's Francis?' She wondered looking down at the dog if a man's coat smelt differently from a woman's.

'Sorry for being late,' Francis came out with a gun under his arm. 'Couldn't find anything.'

'Cynthia coming?'

'No. She thinks she's got a cold.'

Cynthia, Stella thought, stooping to pet Sam, didn't care much for shooting anyhow. Nor did she so far as the actual shooting was concerned. She only liked the thought of walking over the winter fields, struggling through hedges and in and out of ditches, and coming home later, tired and hungry, too tired to remember that there had been a War and that Godfrey and David were dead.

'I expect Cynthia's wise,' she said. 'I believe it's going to snow.'

Francis opened the door of the big coach-house, and backed the old Ford luggage cart into the yard.

'We might try the lower pond for duck before it's quite dark. Look out for Sam.' Sam pushed his great body past

Stella as she stood on the step. 'Afraid of being left behind,' Francis said.

She stood on the step and stared into the coach-house at the dim shape of a brougham which had not been used for many years. Beyond the brougham was a pony trap which had cost Francis' father a pretty penny, as he had said at the time. It was no good now for anything except breaking up. Stella, staring at them, didn't see them because she was thinking of the lower pond which she and David had tried for duck on an autumn evening.

'Am I all right?' Francis asked, backing out.

'All right.'

She sat down with Sam against her knees. Francis, bumping out of the yard on to the back avenue, said, 'Good Lord. It's as bad as France. We'll have to do something about it.'

The avenue at Winds was as bad, she said. Lorries bringing forage for the horses had gone right through it in places.

They turned on to the main avenue and drove between winter fields.

'Where are you going, first?' she asked, her eyes and face cold.

Francis thought they might try the upper fields and see if there was anything in them. And by the time they had gone over them it would be getting dark and they could drop down the hill to the lower pond and have a shot at that before they went home. There ought to be plenty of birds after all this time.

'The big field where we used to grow turnips,' he said. 'I suppose Durrant has still got turnips in it. I haven't been this way yet. You were always pretty sure of finding partridge there.'

Sam against his knee did not stir, although for four years he had dreamed of that turnip field.

Francis drove slowly over the rough road. The fields slipping by them, were grey and cold under the winter sky.

He thought there would be snow soon, his voice muffled by his coat collar. It didn't matter now, she thought, thank God, if it snowed in France. He thought, what the wind would have been like coming over those flat German fields Barbed wire couldn't keep that out. And they'd been sure they'd have another winter of it up to the last. . . .

They kept their thoughts to themselves. Stella was glad that Cynthia hadn't come, that Cynthia was at home by the fire. She saw her with the curtains drawn and the wood fire piled high and the tea table ready, waiting for them. It was easy enough with Francis when Cynthia wasn't there. He didn't talk much, and Stella didn't talk much, and they didn't know each other well enough for it to matter. They were beginning now and there was nothing to remember or forget. Because they had never shared anything before and now it was like beginning a new chapter.

They drove against the wind into that new chapter, easy and intimate because of their relationship which yet asked nothing of either of them. He had never had to say to her as he had said to Cynthia, 'It was bad luck about David,' feeling the inadequacy and absurdity of his own phrase. Cynthia saying, yes, it was bad luck, felt nothing and marvelled. But she had discovered long ago the insufficiency of grief in such a case as this. He had to talk of all the things that had happened while he was in prison, to learn the things she had not told him and it was painful, this trying to bridge a chasm that lay between them, filled with their experiences unshared. One grew so much in two years of such experience and she seemed to have grown away from him so that at times he stood, as Mary had seen him, at the door, watching Cynthia and shut outside. And Cynthia laid away the cold paper of his letters which she had kept, and turned from the writer of those letters whom she had known well and easily, to face a stranger who seemed to have no resemblance to him.

Stella, driving against the wind, turned her head, saw

something and swore softly: 'You couldn't shut up those dogs.' Francis put on the brakes and looked round. Two white terriers brown up to the shoulders with mud, panted along the grey road followed by a slower hound puppy which no one had had time to train. As the car stopped they slowed down into a walk and coming within a few yards of it, stood still in the middle of the road, looking from Francis' face to Stella's doubtfully. They put back their ears, dropped their tails and wagged them deprecatingly, obviously fully aware of what they had done, but none the less determined to go on doing it.

Francis swore at them, not at all softly. 'Go home,' you ruffians.' They had left the terriers with Cynthia in the library, two well-behaved dogs, warming their white stomachs at the fire. Now with those stomachs covered with mud and their faces mud-splashed and imploring, they were hardly recognisable. Francis shouted at them again and they only sat down in the middle of the road at a safe distance and watched him. As soon as he drove on, they would follow again, at a safe distance.

The clumsy hound puppy catching up, lumbered past them.

'That damned puppy, too' Francis looked over his shoulder, shouting hunting noises which conveyed nothing to the stupid puppy blundering on. They might have stirred some memory of his ancestors but nothing more. He had been born in a year when no one had had time for fox hunting or teaching hound puppies to work.

Francis laughed, giving it up and relief showed in two muddy anxious faces, watching him. 'They won't help our shooting.' The terriers were already, in their joy hunting in the ditch. Perhaps Francis too, didn't mind very much if he got anything. So long as he was doing familiar things again, walking through stubble fields and through fields of turnips while the light faded, and dropping down the hill to the lower pond in the dusk.

He turned the car into a stubble field. It was, if anything less bumpy than the road. The field was yellow against a blue-black sky as they drove across it. The dogs raced ahead of the slow-moving car, their white coats showing. Once they stopped to dig frantically. A field mouse, Francis suggested, and laughed.

A cart track ran along the top of the field under a stone wall. It led to a ploughed field, still climbing. They left the car at the gate. Francis with his hand on the gate looked back. 'We've lost those little devils for the moment, thank goodness.'

An ecstatic bark came across the field from a shadowy group of trees.

'They're in the little wood,' Stella said.

'Lots of rabbits to keep them there,' Francis grinned.

'Teaching a hound puppy how to work!'

He pushed the gate open and let it go. It creaked on rusty hinges, swung back and closed again. He and Stella and Sam were inside, with the brown field before them, rising to the cold sky. They seemed, with the closing of the gate, to be shut away in a great quietness and peace which nothing could disturb. Sam, at least had waited four years for this. He stood at Francis' heels, his head lifted, and saw the curve of the field against the sky and Francis' figure as he walked over the brown earth, and the gun under Francis' arm. The retriever padded softly beside him over the furrows, now and again leaping one, stopping when Francis stopped, and standing still, his face lifted to watch him. Once Francis turned and looked back, wondering that those infernal terriers hadn't been on the track before him. Nothing showed against the quiet brown of the sloping field. Where was Sam? He whistled softly. The dog at his heels, watching him, did not stir.

'Where's that dog?' he said, suddenly irritable. Had Sam forgotten in four years and gone hunting too? He had never known him to make a mistake.

'Sam,' he shouted, and still the retriever did not move. Stella looked back. 'Francis. He's at your heels waiting for you. Look'

'Oh.' He turned and found Sam waiting for him. He was apologetic, telling him how sorry he was, what a fool he had been. He had grown stupid, not Sam; and walking beside Sam up the field, stooping, his hand on the dog's head, he told him a lot of things which Sam did not hear. But he felt Francis' hand on his head pulling one of his ears gently and he turned and licked the hand and worshipped Francis with his brown eyes which still saw everything clearly. He saw when something moved on the sky-line, and quivered a little, even though that was none of his business.

They climbed through a thick bramble hedge and fell into a ditch on the other side. 'We might have found a better place,' Francis said getting away from the brambles, which held him like wire. 'Sorry, Stella.'

Stella sucked her hand where a bramble had scratched it and looked across a stubble field before her, and didn't mind, she said. Nor did Sam who had blundered through the hedge stupidly, leaving a tuft of black silky fur behind him. (Neither of them had ever been caught and held up on wire and seen a Very light go up and known themselves to be visible to German snipers and machine gunners.) They climbed out of the ditch and stood in the field and waited for Francis to give them instructions.

Obeying his instructions Stella went a little way from him when they came to the turnip field and walked slowly through the turnips, her feet making a sound in the wet leaves as though she walked through water. And this, she found an amazingly peaceful and comforting thing to be doing, as though she had waited and dreamed of doing it all these years like Sam. She walked through the turnips slowly and the leaves were wet about her ankles and the wind blew in her face and it was cold. But she was comfort-

able inside her jerseys and David's coat, and warm after her walk over the ploughed field, stumbling in and out of the furrows and climbing through the hedge. The field before her was like water, grey-blue under the sky. The light fading a little, made it all unreal, intangible as though she had only dreamed of doing this and was doing it in her dreams. Francis' figure at a little distance was vague, ghostly. She heard him speak to Sam in the low voice people used out shooting and his voice seemed to be caught into the quietness of the winter fields and lost. There might have been no one else alive in the world at all, except herself and Francis and Sam at Francis' heels watching him. Even the terriers had disappeared, going off to hunt on their own. She walked through the turnips and the leaves made a sound against her legs like water and she felt peaceful and content in a world which held only herself and Francis and Sam. She hoped of course that they wouldn't put up anything in the turnip field or anywhere else, and that presently they would go home, she and Francis in the dusk, at their feet a confused mass of dogs and a smell all about them of mud and swampy water and leather and wet dog, not strong enough in the open air to be unpleasant. But the terriers would have to go into the stables when they got back because they wouldn't be fit for Cynthia's drawing-room. They would escape if they possibly could and slink through an open door and sit blinking by the fire drying themselves while the mud caked on their stomachs, dreaming of their hunting in magic woods. Cynthia wouldn't have the heart to turn them out if they once got in and they would know it. They would look at her over their shoulders, their eyes still full of firelight and dreams, melting with their love for her and their pleading, puffing out their little stomachs to the warmth, showing her that the mud was already caked and dried, and couldn't do any harm.

She heard Francis shout suddenly and came awake from

her dreaming, staring across the turnips. Sam had gone ahead, working furiously in and out of the leaves on his own. The turnip field had been absolutely still, but a sudden flutter of wings filled the air as a covey of partridges rose before Sam. The noise of Francis' shouting disturbed the peace which had filled Stella walking through the turnips which were like waves pushing her back. She stood still while Francis shot, then waited while he went forward, searched among the leaves and found something, shook it once or twice and put it in his pocket. The rest of the covey had flown low, vanished against a hedge the same colour as themselves and had dropped down again among the turnips. One was lost, Francis said when she came up with him. He had got two, but three had dropped. Perhaps Sam could still do his job. He had put them up, going on ahead like that and not coming when he was called. Someone had been spoiling a good shooting dog, Francis grumbled, searching in and out of the leaves. He'd have to learn to obey again.

They didn't find the bird although Sam worked frantically as though to make up for that mistake of his. Francis thought it must have got away, running under the leaves not badly hit, a wing perhaps. They'd have to give it up. The light was going. They went on.

The walking was heavy and the leaves as Stella walked through them made a melancholy sound. Somewhere among them a bird was hiding, a wing wounded perhaps. She didn't like that part of it, she thought, looking down as she walked. There might be something almost invisible against the earth. But it would move. Nothing moved. The field was quiet under the sky, growing greyer and more cold. They had lost the terriers, she thought, remembering them. That was luck. She looked up as Francis shouted. Her eyes watering a little, she saw Sam going ahead again. He was muddling things and Francis was going to be angry. He shouted and whistled, but Sam took no notice, running

on in that stupid blundering way. He put up the hiding partridges at the edge of the field, too soon. They flew low for a moment against a brown hedge and brown trees beyond, and were lost.

Francis swore. Sam was worse than useless. The last time he'd bring him out shooting. But he'd have to learn to obey, he said, furiously; learn again if he had forgotten. And he ran across the field with his gun under his arm, shouting angrily at Sam who turned suddenly and came to him.

He crouched at his master's feet while Francis beat him with his hand which wasn't hard enough for his anger, but was hard enough for Sam, seeing that his god was angry but not understanding it clearly. A lot of things had become dim, only half realised to Sam lately. Stella stood at a little distance and felt sorry for Sam, terribly sorry for Sam, yet sorry for Francis too in a way, because she had seen his face when he stooped over Sam beating him. And when he looked up at her again he seemed already half ashamed. 'I suppose he's forgotten a lot of things,' he said. 'After all it's a long time. But he'll have to learn.'

She said rather shyly, not looking at Francis, that she expected Sam would learn again the things he already knew but had only forgotten.

'He's not very young though, is he?'

'No.' Francis looked over his shoulder. 'All right, Sam,' he said softly. The dog's eyes met his. A look of strain showed in them and in his face, as though he were holding to something with an effort, something which he might lose at any moment. But still Francis did not understand. He only said softly as though he apologised, 'All right, Sam,' telling him even if he did make mistakes that they had been friends too long, he and Sam, worked too long together for it to make a difference. And Sam watching him with that strained look tried to find his will and obey it.

After that they dropped down the hill in the dusk which

had come quickly and climbed the stile over which the hedge had grown on either side so that it was almost invisible. (Francis struggling with brambles thought of wire again) Stella wondered if anyone had come that way since she and David came. Francis stood on the sloping ground under the shadow of a wood that ran along the top of the hill and looked down at the pond glimmering in the dusk.

He thought he heard something even from here. He listened for a moment. The sound of a duck getting up through the reeds, wings in the air. He looked at Sam, a dim shape beside him, exaggerated in the faint light. 'Hear anything, Sam?' Sam did not move. He hadn't heard anything then. Only dreamed about it as Sam had dreamed and then muddled everything when his dream came true. He could hear Sam's breathing and see the dog's breath a faint mist in the cold dusk.

'We've strayed those other lads' He looked back over his shoulder. 'That was luck. I was sure they'd find us.'

'I expect they've gone home.'

The bare branches of the wood above him stirred a little in a north wind bringing snow. He whispered to Stella but she did not need to be told what to do, because she had done this with David. She said so.

'When?' he asked, listening in the dusk.

'Oh, ages ago,' her face was hidden. 'Before he went out.'

'Get anything?'

'Nothing to speak of. No duck. Only a pigeon or two. She went down the hill a little and turned back. 'We took Sam. He worked all right then. He'll get into it again.'

Sam looking down the hill to where the water glimmered between the black trees did not move when she spoke his name. At the bottom of the hill Stella opened the gate and went through. She heard it creak as a gate creaks in the dusk. It had creaked like that when she opened and closed

it and stood inside waiting for David to reach the big tree. She waited now for Francis. Nothing, she thought, changed. Fields and woods in winter twilight were the same year after year. As she climbed the slope the other side of the valley an owl called from the woods above. Owls called and partridges rose, but not the same owls and partridges. And people went shooting, only not the same people or the same dogs. Another young dog would go shooting instead of Sam one of these days.

Francis with Sam beside his knees, waiting at the big tree, was thinking 'Stella must be there by now,' and he waited and listened. Nothing stirred in the quietness of the water or the shadow of the reeds about the edge. There must be something, he thought, listening. Perhaps he didn't hear so well since that last show. Sam hear anything? He looked down at the dog whose whole body was alert. He could not see Sam's face which might have told him something.

Francis thought, waiting; a lot of other fellows had done this who wouldn't do it again. His elder brother who had been killed in the South African war, but for which fact he wouldn't have succeeded to Heystead, had stood here in the dusk often and often waiting for the duck to get up, or waiting on a winter morning for them to come in. And before that, other men they had never known, went shooting over the fields up there or waited here and listened as he was waiting and listening, now. An owl called in the woods above the pond, startling him; a snow wind went disturbing the branches. Beside him Sam stood, his body tense and alert, trying to see what he could not hear, and away the other side of the lake there was a sudden disturbance and wings showed dark against the sky. . . .

Stella waited for him at the top of the hill by the stile. She had gone back the way she had come. The winter afternoon was fading, a grey streak turning to yellow caught in the water which was still again now, as though

nothing had happened, no terror come to set all the reeds trembling and troubling the water to the edge.

'Did you get much?' she asked as Francis' figure came out of the dusk

'Not much. There's hardly anything there. I missed whatever there was.'

'What have you got?'

'A pigeon or two.'

A small white thing struggled through the brambles of the hedge, glimmering palely and found them joyously. They climbed the stile and went up the hill in the fading light. Francis thought, it would snow soon, crossing the ploughed field, stumbling in the heavy clay. Somewhere half way over it they had two terriers instead of one. But Sam was lost again as though he hid a pain and bewilderment which the dusk coming over brown and grey fields must soften with everything else. He hunted vague scents in and out of furrows, picked up Francis' track and followed it, a devious route since man cannot make a straight path; while Francis, standing beside the car, whistled and shouted for him, showing him a straight line which he could not follow. The terriers meanwhile, having taken the front seat of the car sat there conscious of their insecurity, peering out with small anxious faces shadowed with mud.

Sam lumbering out of the dusk seemed exaggerated in size, a great white beard covering his chest, white clinging to his soft lips,—the feathers of a dying pigeon he had carried, softer even than his retriever's mouth which they filled, choking him a little.

'Sam's got stupid,' Francis said, waiting for him. 'Here —you fool.' The word said softly in the fading light sounded like a caress. But Sam did not hear, lumbering on, and something reached his master at last, stirred a memory. He had lived equally among animals and men, and he remembered now, a strained young soldier's face

turned to his after a battle which had left most of them deaf.

'Sorry Sir, I couldn't hear,' the boy's eyes concentrated on his face, trying to read what his lips were saying. He lifted the dog's face and looked into it, and the feathers of a dead pigeon caressed his hand. Sam's eyes meeting his, told him everything. The strain had been too great and he was ready to give in now 'So that's it, old man,' Francis said, and he and Sam were alone in the winter fields of which they had both dreamed. 'No more shooting, eh Sam?'

Sam's eyes met his steadily. Francis could not have told why he thought of the fluttering eyes of a dying bird. He talked to Sam, saying a lot of things, and Sam watched his lips moving. He could only watch, hearing nothing, because he had gone deaf, waiting too long for Francis to come.

Chapter 26

ON A JUNE day in 1921 Stella took the boat across the lake at Cappagh to meet Irene and George who were coming to play tennis. They had said they would walk through the woods and arrive about three o'clock, but Stella mustn't wait too long, Nancy Creagh said, standing at the library door to see her go. Because you never knew with Irene. She might say they would walk and then come by car after all. Although, in that case, and anxiety showed in her eyes like faint dust, they might be held up, or the car taken, or the road might be blocked. She was sure she had heard them cutting trees again last night . . .

'I expect they'll walk,' Stella said patiently. 'Anyhow I won't wait too long.'

'You remember the way?'

'Oh yes. I remember it.'

'After all this time?' Nancy Creagh stooped her head and came out on to the steps. 'Nothing's changed except my new garden and that isn't finished yet.' She looked past Stella down the terraces. If she finished the garden she would have to destroy it and remake it or make a new one, to fill her life. But it wasn't finished yet. She was going to catch a stream from the lake to form a water garden. And then Guy would marry perhaps and she would move on and make a garden elsewhere.

Stella went down the terraces in the sunlight, through the darkness of a narrow line of trees across the park and came to the lakeside. She walked along it, towards the boat house, slipped into the shadows and out again, rowing lazily. She was too early and Irene would be sure to be late, Nancy had said.

She rowed across the lake which was bathed in sunlight. (She remembered it grey and cold, black shadowed.) The

sunlight which seemed softer, more liquid than English sunlight, went into the woods between the trees, lighting them. Nothing sinister could happen in such woods, lit through with sunlight so that the shadows could not stay too long, not long enough to hide anything. Nancy, standing on the steps, had said, 'Don't stay if they are too late, because the others will be coming. I am not sure they ought to . . . those young men. The tennis lawn with the woods all about it, isn't really safe.' And her eyes had been dusty again with anxiety. 'But you can't tell them not to come . . . and I don't suppose Mr. Wilmot would listen.' She smiled at Stella who smiled back faintly, acknowledging what Nancy conveyed.

'They're all armed,' she said. 'I don't suppose much could happen really'

'But the tennis lawn.' Nancy looked past her towards it. 'With the wire all round It isn't as bad as the one at Cooperstown. They have had another gate put in for safety. Someone pointed out . . . Sir Martin Shaw . . . that if a raid came—an ambush—while they were playing tennis, they'd be caught inside that wire, like rats in a trap . . . he said.'

The sun went in for a moment. Stella looking towards the woods had the shadow of them on her face They were black and menacing The sun crept out again and lit them, crept through the leaves making light and shadows. Nothing could happen to anyone playing tennis on a sunlit lawn with woods about it. People couldn't be caught there, held in by wire—like rats in a trap. (She heard Alan Goff saying the phrase in the drawing-room at Winds, the fire-light throwing shadows on his face.)

'Well, don't be long.' Nancy Creagh remembered things to be done, the last orders to be given about tea. She stooped her head going in at the door, because the window which had been mended since the War (that was Guy who was so strangely orderly and insistent on order,

more like an Englishman than an Irishman, she often thought, feeling it unreasonable of him and then trying at once not to be impatient), had stuck again because of the damp. But now in this wonderful summer everything would dry again, and her garden would be beautiful in another month. Only they would probably have a drought and have to bring water from the lake as they always had to after a week's fine weather. But the lake would last a long time she thought, looking through the trees, to see it glimmering quietly. There was no fear that it would dry and give up its secret. And when she looked that way, thinking what would be revealed if the lake water were to creep slowly from the bank leaving the muddy floor exposed at last, the anxiety that had crept into her eyes, lay like dust over her face. There was no danger of course. Such a thing had never happened. But it was her own fault for not having given the arms up long ago. She forgot things without Hubert (Hubert had forgotten them but in those days she had remembered), and she meant to do things and kept postponing them. So Hubert's revolver and Philip's which had been sent home with their effects, and Hubert's gun and some revolver ammunition which Philip had left at home on his last leave had lain in Hubert's room where anyone might take them, until one night when sudden terror seized her and she had carried them out and thrown them into the lake. The splash as each heavy thing dropped, had been like the splash of a dead body. She had felt like a murderer and she had not been able to throw them far enough or to feel sure that they were deep enough, for none of her generation had been able to throw as girls could throw now. She had stood listening after the splash. The woods were full of mystery. Something rustled, a branch was pushed back. It was only the wind. The moon caught gleaming silver, the barrel of a rifle. Her heart was in her mouth. She waited for footsteps coming behind her softly, for a soft voice in her ear (they always came softly),

a hand on hers taking Philip's revolver from her.

She threw it with all her strength. Out there it would be safe, buried in the thick mud at the bottom, and if they ever found it, it would be useless. A hundred rounds of ammunition might kill a hundred men. But damp ammunition wouldn't fire, and she wished she had remembered to open the lid of the tin box and make sure of the water coming in. She turned defiantly to face whoever came. She had had enough of death and killing, she would say. If she could save one life by this. . . . But she hoped she wouldn't look into a blackened face because blackened faces were so terrifying. The trees behind her were quiet after a small wind had stirred them. She could see through the black trunks the wall of the house with the moonlight on it. It looked kind and peaceful in sleep, the house which she and Hubert had loved and which should have been Philip's. Philip had loved it too, but because things were like that, it would be Guy's and Guy had talked of Cappagh sometimes as if he hated it. The windows showed darkly, the windows of a house where everyone slept, and below the wall she could see between the black tree trunks the dim shape of her newly made terraces.

It was done now. She looked across the still water into the woods. The rifle barrel she had seen was a slender branch of silver birch, a man behind it, a tree trunk in shadow. No terror surely could come to her from the woods of Cappagh which she loved so much, every inch of them. She built herself into security as she had built herself long ago, with her love of Cappagh and her garden; and she crept home and the lake water was still again, hiding its secret.

There had been Hubert's sword and Philip's sword which he had had at Sandhurst. Mrs. Murphy coming up from the lodge for a day's work in the house had glanced at them, tidying out the Master's room.

'I'd be putting them away, Ma'am,' she said dusting

a picture elaborately 'The boys'd be wild to have them if they knew.'

Nancy Creagh tidied papers equally elaborately. But no one, now, she said, fought with swords, and she wondered about Peter Murphy whose father had died with Philip in France.

'But for the grandeur,' Mrs. Murphy said sympathetically. 'It'd be grand for a boy who might be an officer.' She looked up at the sword which hung on the wall.

'It has G.R. on it,' Nancy said, laughing even then. King George, you know.'

'Sure they wouldn't be minding that,' Mrs. Murphy said, setting a picture straight. 'Not with a grand shining sword like that.'

Nancy Creagh said with great softness:

'I hope . . . Peter's not up to any foolishness, Mrs. Murphy.'

Mrs. Murphy did not answer at once. She took a picture from the wall and dusted it, and looked at her mistress across it. Their eyes met as woman to woman. 'Sure the poor foolish boy,' she said and looked at the swords again. 'I'd be putting the things away in a safe place for a time,' she said persuasively. 'We wouldn't, any of us, like anything to happen to the Master's sword or Master Philip's.'

But women were the same the world over when there was fighting, Nancy Creagh thought, as Mrs. Murphy's eyes lingered over the swords which would be lovely for a boy that might be an officer.

She and Casey, the old butler, hid them that night, not in the loft above the stables. That'd be the first place they'd search, Casey said, blinking his old eyes at her. She had thought of burying them deep, deep, under straw and hay, so that even if they searched, it might be like a needle in a haystack. They were too used to finding things in stables, Casey said. And lofts. Hadn't Mr. Cooper over there, lost the whole of his guns, for all he'd laid them so deep in the

hay and given out that they'd been handed over to the police long ago? The turf rick was too old a game too. Hadn't they hidden in it themselves many and many a time? 'Not you, Casey,' she whispered following him as he led the way. 'Nor these boys. That was more than a hundred years ago.'

'But they know all about it from the history they're taught.' He turned to speak over his shoulder and she wondered for a moment if he was a rebel too, if he would have been 'out with the boys' for all his age but for his love for her and Cappagh and the Creaghs and Hubert and Philip who were dead.

When they had hidden the swords like conspirators, whispering over their task (and how cold the kitchen passages were, full of a faint mist which their candlelight cut through), he followed her back to the drawing-room, made sure again that all was shut up for the night, and asked her if she wanted anything before he went to bed.

'Nothing, thank you, Casey. I am going up in a minute.' She stood by the fire holding her hands to it, because it had been chilly down there, and the swords had been icy cold, freezing her fingers. They felt numb as if she had held Hubert's sword and Philip's too long.

'Good-night, Casey,' she said, over her shoulder. He shut the door and she thought that he had gone. She started, finding him beside her. As she turned to face him, her sleeve sweeping the chimneypiece, left a little channel in the turf dust, as her fingers had left it when she showed it to Edmund Urquhart long ago, telling him that Irish servants were so bored with monotony, doing the same things every day, but altogether wonderful in an emergency.

With the dust swept from the chimneypiece grey on her sleeve, she looked down at Casey as he bent over the fire pretending to attend to it. Finding nothing else to do, he took up the hearth brush and began to sweep. The turf ash rose a little filling her nostrils. The room smelt of it, the

smell which she carried with her when she was miles away because it belonged to Cappagh.

'Them Murphys,' Casey said, sweeping. 'I'd be careful of them Murphys. That young lad.'

'Yes,' she murmured. It was wonderful what Casey got into 'them Murphys,' of hatred and contempt. He could not have hated them so much if he had not been a Tipperary man and if they had not claimed to come from Tipperary too. 'A very small part of it,' Casey had said gloomily.

'I thought that,' she said, almost whispering. The little cloud of turf ash as soft as air seemed to hide their voices as they stood there, whispering.

'I wouldn't like to see them coming into the place at all,' Casey grumbled, sweeping. But Michael, she reminded him, had died with Master Philip—and he had been a good poor man. Though she agreed it wouldn't do to let Michael's son know about Master Philip's sword. And Peter Murphy was growing up, and how time flew. She sighed, leaning one arm on the chimneypiece and sweeping a little more dust with her sleeve.

Casey said, standing straight, 'Good-night, Ma'am.'

'Good-night, Casey. Thank you'

She stood under Hubert's portrait and Casey blinked up at it.

'I'd do more than that for you, Ma'am. And for the Master.'

The Master now, she thought, her always irrelevant mind wandering, was Guy, but Casey was thinking of Hubert.

'Thank you, Casey. You've been with us . . . a long time.' He had known Cappagh before she knew it. She couldn't realise that, because no one, not Hubert or Philip had loved Cappagh as she loved it. One had to stand outside perhaps, insecure, even though one tried to build security from the earth and from the garden. One of these days she must leave Cappagh which was Guy's, which she

must hold safe for Guy from some fear that waited beyond the woods, creeping up through them.

Casey said softly. 'I've always lived under the Creaghs and found them good to their people. They say that.' He glanced towards the window.

'I hope they'll go on saying it.'

'I hope to God they will, Ma'am.' His voice had the fervency of a prayer.

She thought, 'That may save us and Cappagh. Good-night, Casey,' she said aloud.

'Good-night, Ma'am.'

Stella knew nothing of all that, or of the secret that the lake held, rowing across it on a day of June when the sun shone as she had not known it could shine in Ireland. A swan, the descendant of a swan which Edmund Urquhart had teased seven years earlier, moved across the water beautifully its wings snowy in the sun. She passed it, splashed it a little with an oar as Edmund Urquhart had splashed its ancestor, laughed at its anger and shot away to the far bank where she waited in the shadow of the woods.

It was quite cool here although it had been so hot in the sun. Irish heat was exhausting, Nancy said, because it was damp. She sat in the boat in her thin tennis frock, liking the coolness, and wondered if Irene would come by road after all.

She moved an oar occasionally as the boat drifted. She bumped up against the bank and pushed it away, drifting out on the water. Irene and George were late. They must have come by road. And would they, in that case, have been held up, or have found the road blocked?

She saw the trees across the road, the leaves making a high screen, one broken branch perhaps sweeping the dust. She had had to go into the ditch, riding home yesterday. It was just possible for a horse to squeeze through. Another day she had been walking and it had been easy enough to climb over the thick tree trunks. She had found two or

three boys sawing at the thinner branches with a desperate speed which made their small hands clumsy. They had looked over their shoulders all the time. The wood had been difficult to cut, being full of sap, and Stella had felt sorry for it with all its beauty laid in the dust.

'We're cuttin' it for firewood,' one of the boys had said to her, his face red and white by turn with exertion and alarm. 'It's a grand chance of firewood, me father says. But if They catch us.' His eyes straining back like a hare's, were wide with terror.

'Why doesn't your father cut it himself?' she asked.

'Sure he's at home in bed sick, the poor man,' the other boy said hastily.

The sound of the desperate sawing had followed her as she went on along the white road between the June hedges. She wondered if They would come on the scene, and what would happen then. And she thought she'd rather like to see Them . . . in the daytime of course. But no one ever seemed to see Them except at night. She looked out of her window that night recapturing her childhood's terror of the dark woods which seemed to menace the house, lying asleep. She had been terrified of the moment when she had had to put her nightdress on over her head, being lost, helpless in the darkness for a long moment in which she might be taken defenceless. She had always come out the other side and blinked at the candle with a sense of amazing escape.

The woods were quiet against the summer sky from which the last light had not yet faded. Above the blackness of the trees a long streak still showed, green, lit through with rose. As she watched, the rose faded. On every side the blue-black of night was creeping up, but still the long streak of green remained. It vanished miraculously before the moon, which rose suddenly lighting the distant lake water, deepening the black of the woods. She could not see now if anything moved in them. Under her window the terraces were silver. Small black shadows ran over them,

nibbled at Aunt Nancy's flower beds, tore up the flowers and played with them joyously. The rabbits would burrow under any wire. Someone had said trapping was the only thing, and Nancy Creagh had looked at the one who had said it, in horror.

'You have to choose between the rabbits and your garden,' he persisted, sticking to it, and Nancy Creagh who loved her garden more than anything in the world said, 'There could be no choice of course if it meant a trap. But if only they'd leave me what they *don't* eat.'

They were tearing her garden to pieces now under Stella's window. She clapped her hands and a dozen little black shadows turned into white scuts in the moonlight. But when she went back to bed they crept out again, and in the morning the paths were strewn with the plants they had rooted up only to play with.

Stella had helped Nancy to repair the damage as far as possible this morning, feeling the uselessness of it because to-night the same thing would happen again. Nancy thought they must have got in under the wire and made a burrow somewhere in the garden which meant if they could not get them out, there would be myriads next year. How was she to get them out? She looked at Stella. She did not like ferrets much better than traps. Had Stella ever heard a rabbit cry? She had—just before the War when they were all so happy. It had seemed like an omen. She had never forgotten it.

Stella, wondering what they were going to do about the rabbits which were certainly ruining the garden, bumped against the bank again, heard a sound and looked up.

'Oh,' she said. 'It's you.'

The happiness in the face of the young man looking down at her from the bank, faded a little. She felt sorry and irritated at once. It had been silly of him to stand there beaming like a silly sun, but it was equally silly of him to look now as if the sun had gone in.

'You were expecting someone else?' he said jealously.

'Yes.' She was irritated still, hardly knowing why. She did not relieve him at once.

'The others went by car,' he said. 'They'll be there by now. I walked . . . through the woods.'

That was obvious, she thought ungratefully. He had walked . . . thinking of her, romantically . . . through the woods.

'That was silly of you,' she said. It was a relief to tell him how silly he was, to say the word. She looked into the darkness behind him. The woods were black after all, the sunlight going such a little way. Something might happen, she said, in the woods. He laughed. Nothing could . . . why should it? Her eyes moved from his face to his pocket which bulged a little. It wouldn't be any use, she thought, furious with him. Didn't he know? And her eyes were black with the shadow behind him of which he knew nothing. The lake water was suddenly grey and cold rippling to the shore. It caught fresh shadows from the tree-roots standing up on the bank making a criss-cross on the water like wire.

'Would you mind?' he asked . . . 'A little bit.' A sound behind him brought her heart into her mouth. The woods might be full of them and there would be no time, no time. And he stood there foolishly with his back to the woods, defenceless, helpless, fumbling in his pocket. How long would he go on fumbling? And what use would one revolver be against a dozen? He only saw her face and his own was happy again. He had heard nothing. He had walked, she thought despairingly, through the woods, hearing nothing. (Which was what he had done)

'I might as well get in,' he said. 'I may . . . I suppose?' Behind her the grey lake water sloped to the sunlight and became blue. But she looked beyond him all the time into the shadow of the woods. And, looking over his shoulder, he said the woods were lovely now. And nothing

could happen on such a day as this, or in such woods. He was patient, trying to catch her mood, but he could not find her, because he did not know what had happened on such a day as this, in such woods. But when a branch snapped behind him, he started a little, his hand going to his pocket, and swung round and she saw his back turned to her, his poor defenceless back if anyone came that way, in the grey tweed coat, looking so big and square and yet so strangely helpless. And beyond him she saw who it was that had made a branch snap, an old last year's leaf crackle under their feet. 'We thought you must have gone by road,' she said, facing Irene and George.

Chapter 27

THEY rowed back across the lake in the sunlight. Stella said: 'You don't remember me. We met here . . . ages ago . . . before the War,' and blinked and stared at Irene.

Denis Wilmot pulled the boat out of the last shadow with a long stroke, rested on his oars a second, and looked at Stella. 'You must have been a tiny kid then.'

'She was' Irene turned her eyes on him for a moment, liked him and turned back to Stella. 'I think I remember' She was trying to. Nothing was very clear to her that had happened before a certain day in 1915 when she had had to wake George and send him to the War.

'You were here . . . a child. We played tennis and it rained.' She looked past them, through them, remembering Edmund Urquhart who for one grey summer afternoon at Cappagh had been in love with her. Her eyes coming back, rested on George. 'Shall I take them now?' he was saying, patiently impatient with Denis Wilmot's rowing.

'We were late,' she said. 'To-day I mean,' as though they had shared that journey back with her to the summer of 1914 when she had been late too. They might have thought she was apologising for that day, as she had apologised to Hubert, turning her eyes on him, to make no apology necessary. 'I am always late,' she said dreamily, half in 1914, half in 1921. 'Poor George. He is too patient. But perhaps it wouldn't be any use.' She laughed.

Denis Wilmot thought with a little shock of bewilderment such as Edmund Urquhart had felt at Cappagh seven years earlier, 'She's in love with him,' and stared in amazement at George who took it easily.

'I've got used to your unpunctuality,' George Marsham said. 'But if we don't hurry now, we shan't have much time for tennis. And it isn't often you can be sure of your

tennis here without rain. Not a sign of it.' He looked up at the sky as they came away from the woods into open sunlight. And Irene too, said she had never seen anything like it. And Ireland was putting on her loveliest colours for them, she said, leaning forward a little to Denis Wilmot. There had never been such a summer.

'The year they had that Rebellion,' George said, rowing. 'They say that was record weather for the time of year. I was in France, then.' She looked a little shocked, sitting back on her cushions as though George had said the wrong thing. But anyone would have known to look at George, that he would very often say the wrong thing.

'I remember.' She went back to Stella. Getting out of the boat, she walked with Stella across the park and up the terraces through the garden. 'Nancy's new garden,' she said. 'How lovely it will look next year!'

Stella thought it should, but it wouldn't because of the rabbits, and anyhow no one knew from day to day. But that seemed to her quite a natural way of living for she had grown up during the War and was just twenty. 'I remember you, too,' she said, and, half in 1914, half in 1921 as Irene had been, she stared at her, and ached over her beauty. She had thought somehow . . . it seemed a long time ago. But Irene was just the same.

'You wore a hat,' she said, 'just that colour. I've always remembered it,' and she laughed and looked down at her own hands and thought how ugly they were. She had not discovered that Irene's hands were now ugly too, having known too much of chemicals and disinfectants. She only saw Irene's face, the little black shadow of her hair under her hat which was the colour of her eyes, blue, faintly mauve, like heather-covered hills seen in the distance.

'We played tennis,' Irene went on, remembering. Behind them the men's voices, talking of nothing important, were vague and indistinguishable. As they climbed the terrace

they heard the sound of balls from the tennis courts, and saw white-clad figures against the woods beyond.

'They've got the second court going,' Irene said.

'Yes. They're not playing too well of course. It's the first year really. And they were meadowed all during the War.'

'It rained,' Irene said going back to '14. 'And we lost the balls. There were holes in the wire.' The word seemed to frighten them both for they were silent suddenly. 'Hubert used to talk of mending it.' She went on presently with an effort. 'But it wasn't done. It never is done here, you know.' She turned her eyes on Stella. Her lips moving a little as she smiled, completed her perfect beauty. 'But we mean to do it. And now, "when the trouble is over."' She sighed, coming to the top of the hill, her eyes on the white-clad figures against the green. 'We say that, instead of "next summer" or "when the rain stops" as we used to say. But Nancy,' she said, her mind as irrelevant as Nancy's, 'is as bad as any of us—or worse.'

She stood still, waiting for George, listening for George. He made them hurry and then was late himself in the end. 'What a lot of young men,' she said looking towards the tennis courts. 'Not from the neighbourhood.' They were nearly all dead she thought. Her own brother, Michael Shaw, Philip . . . Edmund Urquhart who hadn't belonged, but was Philip's friend.

'Soldiers, I suppose,' she said, and into her eyes turned to Stella there came suddenly a look of remembering more clearly, and with the remembering, a look that Stella knew well. When one met people who had known one as a child, or had met at Christmas parties with David or people one met afterwards during the War and then by some chance again, they looked at one after the first greeting in that doubtful, searching way. Afraid to say that they hoped all had gone well, afraid to ask and unable (that was a forlorn triumph) to read anything at all from your face. Irene's

eyes asked a question clearly as though she had spoken. She did speak, but only to say: 'I remember you quite well now,' and waited. George Marsham and Denis Wilmot came up the path behind them.

'Energetic people,' Denis called in his cheerful voice, 'We couldn't keep up with you.'

'I was here with my brother,' Stella said.

'Yes,' Irene's eyes turned to her, had that little cloud on them which lay over Nancy's when she hoped the road wouldn't be blocked, and that they would not be held up, or when she thought, saying nothing, of the arms and ammunition lying in the mud at the bottom of the lake and Hubert's and Philip's swords hidden where only she and Casey knew.

The cloud lay over Irene's eyes dimming them while she waited. She should have known . . . but she forgot things. Stella heard other stumbling voices asking the question . . . soldiers she and David had known together, stammering over it in their fear. 'And your young brother? . . . Oh . . . I am so sorry . . . I mean . . . that I didn't know . . . that I asked.'

She stood in the full sunlight which warmed her through her thin frock and looked at Irene and thought no one ought to look so beautiful. Not now. Cynthia didn't look as beautiful. Not now. She had waited too long like Sam—for Francis. And now she had watched Francis too long, and been too patient. And sometimes Stella hated Francis who had made Cynthia look so brave and so patient. 'A gallant soul,' Maurice Liddell had said, looking at her from the distance he must always keep between them, because he loved Francis too. Stella, thinking of Cynthia almost hated Irene answering her. 'Yes. David and I were here together. A boy at his school had got measles and he had been sent home.' She remembered that the measly boy, Williams, to whom they had been grateful in a purely selfish way, had been killed afterwards in Mesopotamia.

'But we were often here,' she added, looking down the terrace to the lake like an old person remembering. Cappagh stood out almost more clearly in her childhood's memory than Winds because it held the last days before the War. 'David was killed in 1918,' she explained, facing Irene. Behind them came Denis Wilmot's cheerful voice.

'They're calling us. We can make a four now. Mrs. Marsham and I will beat you two. Come on, Stella.'

Stella heard him with only faint irritation. Because he hadn't been in the War, he made so much noise. All the men she knew—Francis, Alan Goff, Maurice Liddell were silent and liked quietness. They sat for hours and hours saying nothing and you couldn't guess their thoughts, shut out from an experience you had not shared. She hunted with Francis sometimes, and shot with him (over a young half-trained dog who would never be what Sam had once been), and in a whole afternoon Francis hardly spoke a word.

She went on talking to Irene in the sunlight where there was no shadow at all except that faint cloud of anxiety that had come to Irene's eyes and was already clearing.

'May '18 it was. His first show really. The Chemin des Dames.'

She looked at Irene, waiting for the others to come up. What she said really was, 'Yes. We were children here—and then the War came.'

When the last game of tennis was over, she took Irene upstairs to wash her hands because they were staying to dinner just as they were. But they must get home before Curfew, they said, and all the soldiers said at once, putting on their coats which hung awkwardly on their bodies because of the weight in one pocket, that they would convoy them home.

'And we should be in more danger then than ever,' Irene said, her eyes going from one coat to another. She and Stella went up together to Stella's room. From the

window they could see the tennis lawns with the quietness of evening coming over them, the nets loosened now, the racquets and balls all collected and brought in. The lawns in the light of the summer evening had already an unreal air as though they had been played on, a long time ago, by people now dead. A rabbit crept out from the long grass beyond the wire, reconnoitred thoughtfully with his nose, his tiny ears listening and straining. Soon the shadows would have deepened and the world would belong to him, a tiny shadow safe and hidden among many shadows. He nibbled sweeter grass than that to be found nearer home, heard something, feared something, and fled before the fear.

'The tennis balls still get lost,' Irene said, taking off her hat at the dressing-table and staring at her face thoughtfully in the glass. The long shadows outside crept over the lawns and were in the room. The mirror seemed full of them, reflecting Irene's face only dimly. 'We used to spend hours hunting for them. Dora was good at finding them, I remember.'

'She finds them still,' Stella said. 'But only by accident. She is almost blind, you know. And I suppose balls have no smell.' Dora had brought her one yesterday when they searched, swimming through the grass like a young dog again, laying the ball at Stella's feet triumphantly. Stella had taken it up and looked at it for so long that Dora, not able to see her face, was still faintly anxious.

'Where did you find it then, clever Dora?' Dora could not answer the question. She had found it deep, deep in the grass, seven years' growth of grass, a tennis ball that had been lost by dead players before the War.

'We searched and searched,' Stella said. 'And perhaps it was last year's even then. It is no good now, Dora.'

She had thrown it over the wire into the shrubbery where it might lie hidden for ever, and Dora's face had been troubled, watching her, not understanding. She had dug so

long and so patiently in the thick rank grass to find the ball that was hidden there, and which only she could find.

'One of these days I suppose Guy will put up fresh wire. He is so competent and English as Nancy says, not knowing where it came from. Not from her.' Irene powdered her nose carefully. Her face looking back at her from the mirror, glimmered, a small perfect oval in the shadow of her hair. Stella stood in the middle of the room and looked into the glass over Irene's shoulder to see Irene's face caught in it. She brought her hot water from the bathroom, going down the long corridor full of the soft light of the summer evening. The house was full of the smell of roses and syringa from the bowls in the hall below, and the faint smell of damp drying in the wonderful summer. (Outside the rabbits were growing bolder, small shadows lost among many shadows.) Below the bathroom window the path glimmered white going down to the garden, the path at which Nancy had looked long ago, turning her head as she sat at the dinner table where they talked of Irene and Cicely, building herself into security with her love of Capagh and her garden. They sat at dinner again with the windows open and the paths growing paler outside, half an hour earlier than usual so that their visitors might get back before Curfew.

'And you won't let us escort you,' Denis Wilmot said, leaning towards Irene across the table. 'You don't trust us then?'

Irene turned her face to him, dazzling him a little.

'Light the candles,' someone said, because the panelled dining-room got dim so early. Stella winced before the splutter and flame of a match as she had winced when an arrow of light struck her from the railway station, saying good-bye to Alan Goff a long time ago. It was ridiculous to mind, she said to herself, turning to talk to another young man beside her. She talked a lot and laughed a lot, showing how little she minded, and presently she found

Denis Wilmot watching her jealously, and she sat suddenly quiet again in the candlelight.

Sir Martin Shaw who had stayed to dinner too, talked of the weather. Never knew anything like it. And he was on the lake already.

'What are you doing for water?' he asked Nancy abruptly and she started. No, they were not on the lake yet, she said, her eyes wide beyond the light of the candles. She leaned back into the shadows. That might come indeed, she acknowledged, at any moment. And she turned her head a little so that she could see the open window and the terraces dropping from the house, and if she moved just a little, the glimmer between the trees of the lake water under the evening sky. They had enough for a few weeks more and one never knew here, did one? she asked him.

He agreed that in this country one never knew, and he had nearly said 'this damned country' although he loved it almost more than she did, and would have died at once away from it. The weather was on Their side, he said, looking towards the door and over his shoulder at the open window. Nothing showed except the quiet trees and the glimmer of the pale path that led to Nancy's garden. They'd have a long summer before them, all on Their side. But another winter, he thought, would finish Them. No fun being out on the hills in the winter . . . and no stamina, most of them. . . . If the Government would only hold out. Another winter . . . he was sure of it.

'Out on the hills,' she thought dreamily. The phrase thrilled her. How shocked he would have been if he could have known. And then, being fond of her, he would shrug his shoulders remembering that she was English which explained everything. The clock struck and there was a sudden silence. Someone moved in it. 'We'd better be going.'

'Must you?' She started a little, coming into the light. She had sat leaning back, her head and shoulders outlined

against the window as she had sat that other night before the War when they sat here talking of Irene and Cicely. Turning her head a little she could see the path to the garden and through the other window, the streak of silver water where the lake held its secret.

'You haven't seen the garden,' she said to Sir Martin Shaw. 'You must come again. The roses are going to be wonderful. The rabbits can't get at them Oh, you must come and see them' Her voice was suddenly joyous over the beauty of her roses.

'You've been doing such a lot,' he said, and thought it strange that she should do so much when she would have to leave the place one of these days to Guy's wife. And he looked up at the portrait of Hubert's father who was so like him that it might have been Hubert. He caught a glimpse of Philip in the portrait. He was beginning to forget what Philip had looked like (He had had to come to look at a picture of his own son who had been killed about the same time, losing his face otherwise) He thought, looking at the portrait: it had been a thousand pities about Philip. And he thought, as Guy had known he would think, that if it had had to be one of them . . . a pity Guy and not Philip had been left But a good thing at least that there was Guy. He prepared to go home to his own empty house.

'Before Curfew. Else the Black and Tans may put a bullet through me,' and he glared at the soldiers about the table as if it were their fault. They offered to see him home, a little bewildered by these people who were loyalists and so hospitable to them and forlornly heroic hoping the Government would hold out, whatever that holding out might mean to them, without protection. He refused almost gruffly. They were hurt, remembering that Irene had refused too

They stood on the steps and saw Irene and George go first. And in the dusk the old man talked of Guy. He couldn't come, he supposed.

'Not till the trouble's over. It wouldn't be safe. No use taking the risk,' she said.

Good God, he thought not. And one never knew although the Creaghs were so popular. Some fellow coming in from another county, or down from Dublin. And he looked after Irene and George driving away in the Cappagh car and hoped they'd get there safely. So quiet the whole country seemed, the long avenue running into quietness, that it seemed impossible that they should not get there safely. 'Not another car on the road,' he said listening. 'You could hear that for miles.' The car wound down the avenue past a group of trees and out of sight. There was no traffic on the roads which lay quiet, white, still ribbons intersecting the country. In the fields either side, lambs called. The birds sang wildly in the hedges as though this silent world belonged to them.

Denis Wilmot said, getting into a car and making sure of his revolver: 'Sure we can't take you, Sir?'

'No, thank you.' He'd walk across the fields. It was no distance.

They settled themselves, their hands in their pockets, and drove away. Denis Wilmot looked back, lifting his hat. Stella waved her hand. They heard the car go down the avenue and on to the road through the village. 'They're all right so far,' she thought listening, and feeling a little sick. If it stopped suddenly. If there was a shot fired. There was no sound except the lambs who ought to have been asleep, bleating noisily in the summer evening, and the birds. They heard the car until it faded away in the distance comfortingly, naturally. After that the whole country lay quiet, given over to the lambs and birds.

Sir Martin going down the steps slowly, and as they walked with him a little way, talked of Irene. As lovely as ever. He was oddly baffled by her beauty, not understanding it. He had not discovered that she belonged to the country and to Cooperstown, without belonging to

Ireland, except when that troublesome Irish blood stirred. Edmund Urquhart looking on at this life had seen the world between two worlds in these grey stone houses dropped down by the conquerors in the land they had conquered. But the barrier of the trees he had seen as a wall between the two worlds was breaking a little against the sky, something coming through, as soft as a summer wind, as intangible as that smell of an Irish country house in the dusk of a summer evening.

Nancy Creagh felt it and Irene who had been born at Cooperstown and had grown up to the colour of the bogs and skies and mountains, her eyes changing with them. And somewhere far back an ancestor of hers had found a daughter of the conquered race as beautiful as the country he had conquered. The disturbance faint as a summer wind and smell coming through the woods reached Irene and stirred that blood in her. Looking towards the barrier that shut her world in, she knew that it would go down soon, that in another generation their world too would have gone, and there would be only Ireland. But it did not concern her, watching George. Because they had made their great effort, spending everything, and now for all their lives afterwards they must drift in a backwater feeling nothing very strongly, and looking on as though from outside. They had a kind of immunity bought with a price that made their walls unassailable.

Sir Martin who was old and to whom the real world was that which the War had destroyed, and the rest all a gigantic accident, talked of Irene and of Cicely as he had talked seven years ago. It was hard to say now which was the more beautiful. And, though he did not know that, he began to forget, confusing Irene and Cicely. But George seemed a stupid fellow and he didn't know why she had married him. And she didn't look too well, too thin. (He did not know that she had watched George too long.) They must go back now, he said coming to the darkness of the

laurels which edged his path for a little way. The white path was lost in them, a tunnel of darkness, terrifying 'You won't stay the night after all?' Nancy said. 'There's plenty of room' And she was frightened of that dark path with the menacing blackness on either side.

He was sure. It was only a few minutes' walk, to the end of the path and across the fields. And he knew them all, he said and laughed; had known them since they were children. And he'd come again soon and see the roses.

'Yes, you must see the roses,' she said earnestly as though it was immensely important They were so secure, her roses, safe even from the rabbits which were playing havoc now in her terrace garden. Stella going in and up to her room through the house which had the strange frightening quietness of a house which a lot of people have just left, looked out of the window and saw them. She clapped her hands but they had grown almost fearless and did not move at once. The tennis lawns were faint now, the nets hanging loose There were rabbits there too, nibbling happily, tiny shadows lost among many shadows. She looked out and wondered how many balls lay hidden in that thick rank grass which Guy would cut one of these days when the trouble was over and it was safe for him to come. All the balls they had lost that year before the War and some from the year before. Edmund Urquhart had said that one never found this year's balls but always last year's. He had said a lot of other things which she could not remember and she hadn't always been interested. She lit the candles on the dressing-table, sitting down and facing the mirror which had last reflected Irene Seeing again Irene's face glimmering beautifully, she hated her own round cheeks and brown hair and her grey eyes which Denis Wilmot had told her were the very colour of the lake. Except when she was angry and then they looked black like the woods She thought it silly of him to say things like that and to look at her in that way. She

would have liked to have had blue eyes with faint mauve in them like Irene's and to wear a hat the same colour, as Irene did. But she must pay an awful lot for those hats, she thought, hating her own face in the glass and wishing that it was pale and beautiful like Irene's.

Outside the lambs had gone to bed and the birds were getting sleepy. The rabbits were growing bold in the garden, and making the tennis lawns their playground. The path under Stella's window glimmered white running to the stable yard which was grey, black shadowed. A deeper shadow slipped across the grey, whispered to another shadow at the stable door. 'I doubled back. They'll likely not come this way.' The sound of a man panting after running, exhausted, filled the stables, louder than the horses' breathing. A shadow leant against the wall, clutching it, became part of it.

'You can't stay here. They'll be comin' maybe.' Ears strained and listened. All through the quiet country nothing stirred. 'The loft . . . if you can get up the ladder.' He touched something wet and sticky as the shadow reeled against him. 'You're wounded.'

'Only me hand. If ye can give me your arm.'

With the hay piled on top of him carefully so that he could breathe through it, by someone who knew all about piling hay on living men, he fainted. 'Ye'll keep still,' a whisper said at the door. 'Anything at all sounds in hay . . . if they come.' Even breathing, he thought. There was no answer. 'Just as well,' he thought, guessing what had happened. The hay was still, hiding a shadow and a black stain which spread gradually, going down, not up, so that nothing showed in the loft which was presently left in dimness. The dusk thickened through the yard outside, leaving it presently quiet in the summer night, the stable walls and roofs throwing black shadows on the grey cobbles.

Chapter 28

'IT ISN'T as if you were Irish,' Denis Wilmot said helplessly. 'If you were Irish, I should understand.' And he meant that he would have known at least that he could never understand her.

She listened, thinking she heard something.

'You ought to go.' Why, she asked him suddenly, fiercely, had he come?

'To see you.' Because he was going on some show. The word was a legacy to him from older men. He had learnt it like a new boy learning the traditions of a school. The same men had taught him to regard this as a picnic. It was another tradition handed down, which because he had just missed the War he could not fully understand 'It was luck finding you were here. What were you doing, Stella?'

What had she been doing, standing by the lake after dinner in her thin frock?

'I took Dora for a walk,' she said prosaically 'Dogs, you know, always ought to have a walk after dinner' Or perhaps he didn't know, she thought, half pityingly, half contemptuously. He lived in London and was shut out from the wonderful world of country knowledge, animal knowledge. It made another barrier between them, less high than the barrier which kept her from ever speaking to him of David. They belonged to the same generation and each of them had just missed the War. He had been too young to get to France, she too young to do war work. It should have made a companionship between them. But the barrier rose as faint, as intangible as mist, thickening, so that each was hidden from the other and they could not meet. She had been thinking of David here by the lake when he came through the trees startling her. In uniform

. . . he shouldn't have done that. It was dangerous, she said, looking over her shoulder, peering between the trees, listening and straining. To come in uniform even a little way through the woods.

'It isn't far. The others are on the road down there,' he jerked his head. 'Because we're going on some show up in the hills.'

She thought of Peter Murphy, who had been missing this week past. Would he find Peter Murphy somewhere up in the hills?

'Night raids,' she said. 'There was one in the village last night. The dogs went on barking until the early morning.'

'They always do.' His face in the summer dusk was pale and weary. He had no right to look like that, disturbing her. 'They make such a noise.'

But he, she thought, couldn't mind noise. Not a few dogs barking, the rattling of lorries. It was nothing to the noise there had once been, which she had never heard, but which because of that, must be in her ears all her life

'I saw you riding to-day,' he said. 'You didn't see me. We couldn't stop. You went up a lane and hid there from us.'

Did he, she asked, think a horse would like those lorries? Let alone that a shot might go off any moment. But in any case she had been going up that mountain lane. Always—since she was a child at Cappagh—they had taken the horses there in the summer when the flies were bad everywhere else. The flies didn't seem nearly as bad there, and there were trees to make shade and a stretch of grass at the side to canter on, and half way a delicious little stream that ran under the road and out on to the marshy mountainside beyond

But she hadn't known who was in the lorry. She softened. She had heard it coming and had fled before it in sudden fear, only controlling it, lest she should affect the horses. She had had one on a lead too. A nice business it would have been, the two of them jumping round in front of one

of those lorries. They had gone up the lane and waited, half hidden behind the thick green May hedges, deep in peace. The lorry roaring by, had left quietness after it.

'You ought to go.'

'In a minute.' He listened. 'I shall have to.' He turned for a moment, listening. Why had he done that? She saw his back and shoulders, his poor defenceless back, not in grey tweed, but in uniform, with the strap across it which must, if he wore it long enough, mark his body. She smelt the leather—new leather, faintly different from that other familiar smell.

'It's all right,' he said, turning back to her. 'I thought I heard something . . .'

She stared at him. He could not know that she was seeing someone else, and not able even then to find his face. What had Jim Humphreys looked like? She stood in the darkness of the woods at Winds beside the lake and heard him talking and saw all the things about him that had come suddenly to have an enormous significance. The belt on which he would hang his revolver. (Denis Wilmot had his in his pocket, his hand on it) The lanyard which held his whistle, the place where he would carry a gas mask swung round his neck like a child's bib. The summer moon coming out suddenly caught the metal of the star on his shoulder.

'Stella.' Denis Wilmot came closer to her, the hard leather of his belt hurting her, through her thin frock. 'There isn't anyone else, is there?'

She stared at him her eyes wide as Nancy's had been when she sat beyond the candlelight thinking of the lake water and the secret it held. Someone else? Had he followed her thoughts then? Should she tell him so? But a long time ago—a long time dead. And she hadn't been sure then any more than she was now. So it wouldn't be true to say that there had been someone else. But the barrier rose between them. How could she tell him, how explain?

She thought of David, wondering what David would have been like now. She and David at least had done so many things together that she had some security, thinking of David here, at Winds A branch crackling made them both start It was only Dora hunting with blind eyes, and dimmed smell.

The lake water rippled a little as though something had disturbed it. A branch trembled before a faint wind. He would have to go, she said, and was suddenly in a hurry for him to be gone. It wasn't far really, just through the edge of the woods to the road And was he sure the others were waiting there? She listened as though to make sure. But you couldn't hear people waiting unless they talked, their voices soft, indeterminate in the dusk as people's voices are when they talk only because they are waiting

'We shall be up all night,' he said 'You'll think of me' He looked through the black tree trunks at the long line of Cappagh, soft in the dusk. 'I shall think of you sleeping in there.'

But she wouldn't sleep much, she thought, and somehow couldn't say it, knowing how the happiness would suddenly have shown in his face He went away from her, stumbling a little, through the woods, walking clumsily as a townsman walks in woods, because he was shut outside the country knowledge which would have made him walk quietly, almost stealthily as a countryman walks in woods; not snapping a twig, not stumbling over a branch. She saw him go and felt suddenly the agony of her loss. She was confused over this going because so many others had gone. All through her childhood they had been going. She even ran after him a little way. 'Denis.'

She called softly as country people call in woods at night and the sound was part of the lake water moving, the shaking of the leaves before the wind. He did not hear and she saw his back going away from her, his poor defenceless back, so broad in the khaki tunic with the leather

strap across it. In the dusk the polished leather gleamed a little, and the last light before the woods hid him, caught the glimmer on his shoulder of his one star.

She leaned back against a tree, her white frock making a pale border to it. She could hear him going, breaking through the woods in that clumsy way so that anyone must hear him. She caught her breath as Dora growled at her feet. Bending quickly, she held Dora, her hand over the groping muzzle that must do double work for the blind eyes. Dora struggled, almost stifled, and they fought each other in the dusk under the black shadow of the tree trunk that hid them, a long battle for Denis Wilmot's life.

He had gone away now, and the woods were quiet, but the man coming along the path by the lake stopped and listened. His figure was black against the grey-green water behind him. He looked tall and thin, exaggerated in size as she watched him, holding her breath. The wide soft hat he wore and the collar of his coat (like a trench coat) turned up about his neck made his face indistinguishable even when he came towards her. He had one hand hidden, and when he was quite close to her—a few trees away, he stopped, listening, and took his hand out of his pocket. The last daylight was still on the path out there although it was dark in the woods. She saw the thing he held, imagining that there was earth on the muzzle, because it had been buried and dug up. She only imagined it of course, remembering something she had heard from someone else who had seen a revolver in this way but in the daylight. She could not see the muzzle in this light.

He passed her, a black shadow on the pale path. The woods caught and held him and he went through them quietly as a countryman goes. Listening, she could not hear a branch snap, an old last year's leaf crackle. He had come out of silence and mystery and he returned to silence and mystery.

She slipped through the woods, holding Dora half

suffocated in her arms. She could not put her down lest she should growl, and everything be lost. But Dora seemed to weigh a pound more each step. 'If you carry a lamb all day,' Connor the groom had said, 'it'll be a sheep by night.' If she carried Dora all day she would be as heavy as Sam by night.

She went swiftly, doubling in and out between the trees. Denis had gone slowly, clumsily, once losing his way. Before she caught him up she heard a whistle some way away behind her in the woods, a soft secret whistle which someone should hear and answer. No one answered if it had been heard, but a shot ringing out suddenly broke all the quietness of the woods. She dropped Dora, suddenly become an intolerable weight, and ran to make sure that Denis was safe. If she caught him up and stood between him and them. . . . They didn't often shoot women, she knew, although they did sometimes. Running, she ran to save Jim Humphreys, Denis and David.

He was at the hedge when she found him; lifting his long legs over it. In the road below, a lorry waited without lights, only the ends of cigarettes showing where men smoked and waited. Seeing him she stopped and listened. All the woods were quiet behind her after that shot which had frightened the birds to silence. Dora crept at her heels trembling, stood on an old dead leaf, and it crackled under her paws. Nothing else stirred. He stood still, his long leg half over the low hedge, brought it back slowly and turned to her.

'I was afraid . . . for . . . you . . .' she said panting. Now he was all right, she and Dora would go home. But he was slow even now, and she longed for him to be gone. Couldn't they hurry him, those other men down there?

'Afraid . . . for . . . me?' he said and in the grey-green light of the summer dusk she saw his face (strained although this was a picnic after that other War) and the sudden foolish joy filling it.

Chapter 29

'AND NOW the trouble's over, you will stay,' Irene said to Guy. She leaned towards him across a bush of wet Golden Rod bent across the path by the rain, in the autumn garden. 'There'll be so much to do,' she said.

He said he had long leave, and wasn't sure yet what he'd do after. And he looked at her as he had looked that day in hospital when his mother had come, and gone away.

'You see,' he said, because she had always understood, 'Cappagh should have belonged to Philip. Philip loved it, you know.'

She said she knew, and her face was wet where the overgrown Golden Rod had touched it. But Philip would have left it to Guy, and she watched his face and knew suddenly that at times he hated Cappagh in an unreasonable, childish way, so that he could have struck at the hard stones of the walls, hurting his hands.

That would have been all right, he said, if there had been time for Philip to marry and leave a son. He'd have looked after the place for the kid until he was old enough. And for a moment she knew that he imagined that Philip had left a son and that he was free.

They walked round the garden in a party as they always walked, saying 'But this is over . . . you should have come last week.'

Nancy, going ahead with George, said alas, her roses were done. But they had been wonderful. And they must try some of them at Cooperstown.

'We can't always be sure of being here for the roses,' he said and she remembered with a little shock that Irene must live in London. And Irene, of course, liked London, but no one ever acknowledged that, feeling a grievance against George—a stupid fellow, as Sir Martin said, and

he didn't know why Irene had married him. And now George seemed really stupid even to Nancy who had always liked him and defended him, and Irene grew paler and more beautiful, watching George. Irene dropped behind with Guy and they talked with the ease of two people who have always known each other and never fallen in love, so that their relationship was easier even than the relationship of brother and sister which demands always sudden awkward reticences, filling a silence with things not to be said. And she looked at him with her eyes clear, facing facts as she had faced them in hospital when he could smell nothing even in memory, except that dug-out with its smell of damp earth and humanity. They were in the same boat.

Because, she said, breaking a Japanese anemone and looking at the white flower curiously, and faltering a little as she walked so that she went into the Golden Rod again and it was wet against her face, they said here, she knew—everyone—why had Philip been killed and Hubert? Such a holocaust, she said simply, of one family. But things happened that way, didn't they? And they wondered why George had been left. Her eyes went away from everything else watching George.

'They say,' Guy said, easy suddenly, and laughed, 'sure it's always the best that's taken. They always say it. But in our case, it's true. Philip belonged here and he ought to have been left. Edmund Urquhart used to say that. Do you remember him?'

She remembered him, her eyes on George. He had rowed them across the lake in the summer evening and had sat in the boat on the still water, waiting for the woods to swallow them. They could come back, he had said foolishly, and play tennis. It hadn't rained since that morning. And they could send a message and stay to supper. And he had sat there moving an oar in the water while they went away through the woods. And then they had met at Victoria and he had seen and thought only of Philip. But for one summer

afternoon at Cappagh he had been in love with her. So she must remember him.

Guy thought as they went towards the house for tea that he wasn't so sure it was all over. And he dropped his voice. He thought there'd be trouble yet with those fellows. They hadn't had enough of it. And when he said that his face was old and wise with experience. Irene looked at the grey wall of Cappagh lying against the woods, and thought it looked secure now, the woods guarding it. But what havoc the rabbits had played in Nancy's new garden, night after night playing games, tiny shadows lost amid shadows! And Nancy didn't really mind, she said, because she laughed surveying the havoc in the morning and said that rabbits were delicious things, even when there were myriads of them, small pointed ears, sensitive trembling nostrils, and little white scuts when you clapped your hands and they ran.

Something showed in Guy's face It was absurd, he said Either make a garden or leave it alone And they went into the library where the fire was lit on a September afternoon as it was lit every summer evening, and they had to stoop their heads going in because the window was stuck

'I though we had that mended,' Guy said irritably, hammering at the window.

They had, Nancy said, but it had stuck again. It always would. The damp . . . although they kept such roaring fires. She looked at Guy, pleading with him but he would not turn his sullen face to her.

Irene, who loved Nancy, thought, 'He hates her now Not always but often and often because she irritates him All her ways . . . her lovely ways.'

She stood by the fire warming her hands as she had stood that day when Edmund Urquhart had watched her and thought she was cold because they had taken her to London, and only a fire of turf and wood in Ireland could warm her. Dora lay on the rug, her paws stretched out stiffly, her

blind eyes half closed showing a mere slit of firelight between the soft lids. She quivered once, dreaming, kicked a leg, and slept again. The firelight crept up Irene's skirt turning the blue mauve of the tweed to rose. She wore beautiful tweeds, searching endlessly, patiently for that colour to match her eyes as she had searched endlessly, patiently, seven years ago. But George did not seem to notice them now.

She said to Nancy, walking down the white path which ran into a dark tunnel of laurels. 'When George went away from Victoria I was sure I should never see him again—so sure that I had no hope at all.'

'But you were wrong.' Nancy's voice was joyous for her friend. 'It shows you, doesn't it? I thought Philip would be killed and Guy perhaps, but not Hubert. I thought Hubert and I would be left without children, growing old here together.'

She looked back at Cappagh waiting for her, the house, still unlit, seeming to lie quiet, asleep. They would go a little way with Irene and George—George and Guy had gone on ahead—through the dark tunnel between the laurels and see them go across the fields beyond. It was a better way at this hour than the way through the woods.

'I wasn't wrong,' Irene said steadily. Her face in the September dusk was a pale beautiful moon, her eyes wide with the darkness of the laurels caught into them. She would always open her eyes wide, facing things, not blinking and turning away.

'But George came back,' Nancy hurried to reassure her, staring into the darkness and thinking of Hubert and the small wet roses that had crept through a window in Sussex to see her wake him.

Oh, no, not George, Irene said. The night was filled with the sound of their feet walking on the bare path. It glimmered coldly, going away from them into the darkness. Someone else, not George. She saw George sometimes

looking at her as though over someone else's shoulder, from an immense distance. She could not reach him. They wanted each other, but they could not find each other—not yet. One must be patient. And they walked into the darkness between the laurels and said good-bye there. And Nancy called:

'Good-bye, George,' and George's voice came: 'Good-bye, Nancy.' And she thought, he was just the same to her . . . but he would be. And Guy said enthusiastically, 'Come again, Irene. . . . If this weather lasts we might have some tennis. A pity we can't get at the guns, George.'

Irene and Guy went away and Nancy turned back towards the house hearing Guy's footsteps behind her, coming slowly now. She walked faster and he walked more slowly, both of them wanting to avoid the intimacy of those moments going towards the house together with nothing to be said.

She had always left doors and windows open so that there was a draught, curtains blowing wildly and papers strewn on the floor. And she had always left water in the bath forgetting to take up the plug and in the basin after washing her hands, so that everyone knew who had been there last. She made such an immense piteous effort for Guy's sake because these things irritated him. But always she was forgetting again. She found it hard now to remember things.

Guy did not want Cappagh at least. That left her in some security. She might grow-old at Cappagh perhaps, leaving it some day for Guy's son. But she would be quite old then and wouldn't mind. One didn't mind when one was old. And they would call him Hubert and there might be another to be called after Philip. She dreamed in the twilight, forgetting Guy's anger.

But she remembered again waking from a sleep in which she had dreamed of him, a child frightened and cold in the night, crying and she could not find him. In the dream there had been only Guy, no memory of Philip or Hubert.

Coming awake in the early morning she got up as she had got up at Winds, and going down the corridor she listened at Guy's door. Opening it a little, she looked in. He lay, wrapped away from her, in sleep, so still that she caught her breath thinking he might be dead. He had never recovered his healthy colour since that gas poisoning and lying now asleep he might have been already dead.

He stirred and murmured something which she could not hear. His face moved nervously. She crept away knowing that he was out in the dark and cold and she could not find him.

He went back to his regiment when his leave was over, leaving her to Cappagh and security, built in by her love of Cappagh and her garden. It would be wonderful next year she said, and she had got some new roses, even lovelier than the last. And they were doing such wonderful things with wallflowers. She had planted them in thick masses and the air would be drenched with the smell of them in the spring Sir Martin going round the garden with her, read their names and snorted, and said he liked the old wall-flowers best. You couldn't beat the dark red—a bed of them, or the yellow, or maybe a bed here and there mixed. And they smelt good enough for him. And she was patient with him, feeling how old he was. She ran on always to new things, new delights, in that ridiculous way of hers as though she were as young as Stella.

Stella came and went at Cappagh, stayed longer and longer.

'Stay always,' Nancy said. 'We should have had a daughter, you know. I feel selfish keeping you. It's dull now all the soldiers have gone away.' And she thought it was sad that Denis Wilmot had had to go and that Stella had let him go with nothing. *She* wouldn't have, she thought, but no one knew about these things except the person most concerned. And there was plenty of time for Stella who was so young.

Stella liked being at Cappagh, she said. She didn't say that she liked dreaming of her childhood as she could dream at Cappagh where she and David had been so happy. At Cappagh the years between dropped out and she went fishing with Guy in the evening, and they didn't talk much, and she took the horses up the mountain lane, cantering on the soft grass at the side. When winter came the stretch of turf was like porridge and she heard it squelching under her. This Irish riding was full of surprises so unlike the riding at Winds and Heystead where one knew where one was. Once a small kid ran out from the hedge under the mare's feet, startling her and the mare; and one never knew what was in the hedges. The Irish mare felt that too, watching them, her ears alert all the time.

Stella worked in the garden with Nancy and a mongrel puppy Nancy had picked up somewhere, thrust its soft, wriggling body between her and the earth, reminding her of the hound puppies who had hindered her in the same way a long time ago before the War. The bluebells came out under the apple trees in the spring so that the apple trees seemed to be floating in a blue sea. Stella standing at the gate looking in, felt the mystery and enchantment of the garden and was back again in childhood. Cappagh held half her childhood and Winds the other so that it seemed the story of life might begin and end at either of them.

She stayed at Cappagh where the hills had a strange familiarity and it was sometimes bewildering to find them unchanged. There was a small kind hill of which she and David had known every inch as Philip and Guy had known it before them. The hill had had an Irish name but the people had corrupted it into the name of a woman, Katty Gollisher. It had a certain appropriateness for anything so comfortable and kind. You could climb to the top of it and lie on the turf cropped smooth by the mountain sheep, with the sky over you and the sun and wind soft as they had been in childhood. Even the little cairn of stones at the top

was not changed. And the wind blew in just the same way, coming from the higher mountains which would take all day to climb. There was a light fall of snow in the winter when Guy was home on leave, and they dug out an old toboggan from the great coach-house full of disused vehicles. They climbed the hill hopefully, Nancy and Stella and Guy, carrying the toboggan. There wasn't enough snow of course and their weight drove the toboggan through it to stick on the grass.

They gave it up, throwing the toboggan into a bush to wait until they came back, and climbed higher through the snow and through the beds of mountain rivers, going over their ankles sometimes in the cold water. The familiar mountain was mysterious and exciting in the snow. It became more mysterious as the short winter light began to fade. They ate a picnic tea standing up, nearly at the top of the hill while a small group of mountain cattle gathered to watch them curiously. The cattle were softly beautiful in the half light and their breath warmed the air for a second and was frozen. Nancy and Stella left Guy smoking a cigarette and climbed higher still over stone walls that fell to pieces under them terrifyingly, and through frozen bushes black against the snow. Below them the country lay vividly coloured, deep green and blue under a blue-grey sky. There would be more snow, Nancy thought. They so rarely got snow here. They hadn't had any since that winter of '16 during the War.

She stood with the wind in her face. It had been a lovely, absurd thing to do. They had all known they would get no tobogganning. She went down hill again, climbed through barbed wire and stuck helplessly on the top of a stone wall. A small brown bullock came to inspect them curiously, breathing on them. She looked back at Stella laughing. It had been a lovely thing to do. And they had lost the dogs who had come with them. Dogs got so excited in snow. A good thing they were all safe with sheep. They could go

home and leave the dogs to follow them. They went down in the twilight which was steely blue and cold. Stella looking back saw the line of the hill which she remembered just the same, the three trees which had been the Crucifixion still black against the skyline as they had been when she and David climbed this hill. She could have wept for happiness that winter afternoon only because Katty Golliher was just the same.

She stayed on into the spring. Ireland was like that Irene said, riding with her on a February morning when the country was flooded with sunlight under a pale sky. The fields were green and yellow and deep brown where they had been ploughed, the hedges black against them. The wet road before them was dazzling with the sunlight on it. They turned on to the soft earth at the side and followed each other. The horses' feet squelched in and out of the mud where there was grass in the summer. Ireland was like that, Irene said, riding quietly again on the wet road, her eyes dazzled with the sun. The longer you stayed, the harder it was to move. Even if one didn't really belong to it. But Stella half belonged really. She stayed at Cappagh and the spring came bringing the bluebells, and there was thick grass at the side of the lane again, and the fields had a magic about them to ride over. And she rowed across the lake disturbing the still water with her passing and waited under the shadow of the woods. And Irene and George coming out of them and standing on the bank, said: 'We've come to tea'

Leaving Cappagh she went to Cynthia. She loved Cynthia but Cynthia did not really want her now, watching small David and watching Francis. Stella thought that when one was married, one was married and quite different, even if one's husband had been killed. Cynthia was married and Mary was still married to Godfrey although he had been killed so long ago. If she had been old enough to marry during the War, Stella thought, she would have been a widow too probably and would have felt quite different

Cynthia would turn from Francis and David to make some plan with Stella. 'I'd love it more than anything,' she would say, or perhaps, 'More than anything in the world,' and smile at Stella absently, saying it, hiding behind the smile as though from a stranger. Stella knew that Cynthia wouldn't love it more than anything in the world, that it didn't really matter at all. Nothing mattered except Francis and small David. And she said that to other people, deceiving them, that she'd love it more than anything, and hiding from them at once behind that smile which was a shadow on her face. Stella would go over at Christmas and Francis and she would have some hunting together. Cynthia hadn't begun again yet, and it was an effort beginning. Stella had dragged her out for a ride in the summer when it was August and the country was yellow and blue as it had been when she and Cynthia had ridden in summer during the War. They rode over to Winds and found the same field and opened the same gate and rode through the same yellow grass. And something broke down in Cynthia as though the riding—summer riding—had done that, and she talked all the way back, as she had not talked since Francis came home.

Stella listened, holding her breath, lest anything should interrupt, anything take Cynthia from her now. Cynthia might have been explaining, apologising, laughing a little in Cynthia's way, smiling in that way that hurt Stella. If things hadn't gone wrong, she said and gabbled a little, talking as though she was afraid of the silence that must come back when they reached Heystead again and rode into the stable yard. If things hadn't gone wrong. She looked at Stella as from an immense distance and bent her head as though before a blow. But she had Francis, she said sitting straight and riding gallantly. And God knew that she understood how lucky she was, having Francis.

They had the ride and Cynthia smiling at her in the yard said she had loved it and there was nothing like

summer riding. But she wondered if she would ever want to hunt again. So Stella must hunt with Francis.

And Mary wanted her in London for some dances. But at the dances in London, all the men were old or schoolboys and Stella didn't enjoy them much. She liked better working with Mary among her slum children. She thought silently that she'd see Alan in London though it wasn't much use because he only looked at Mary and something so terrible had happened to him in the War that he could only look in that tortured way.

She, she knew, feeling her own inadequacy (she belonged nowhere) could not help him. Mary might, and when he came, Mary put away whatever she was doing—it was usually some garment she was sewing for her slum children—leaning forward to him, giving him all of herself that was possible, as though she knew how great his need was. Other people, Stella thought, might not have known. They would have talked or let him talk, going on with what they were doing. Mary hearing the bell ring would say, 'That's Alan,' and would wait, her work still between her hands. And when he came into the room, she would put it away as though she had only waited for him to see her do it. It was as though she must have her hands free, ready to hold him if necessary, giving all her strength to him.

She would say, 'Is there a fog outside?'

'Not in here,' he would answer. 'There is never a fog in here, Mary.'

'But you found the door? We lit the lantern over it.'

'I found the door. I saw the lantern half way down the street and the green door under it. You have had it repainted.'

A prettier green, she said, didn't he think so? That pale green framed in white. It got dirty so soon, she said and was extravagant. Godfrey would have said so. Didn't he think Godfrey would? What's wrong with dark blue or red, Godfrey would have said. (He helped himself to a drink

and heard Godfrey's voice saying it.) But he would have taken her side. You couldn't beat that green.

But you must have the white, she said, to frame it, and it was the white that got dirty and you couldn't wash it. And he had been home from India, how long now? And he had been to the Manor House. And how did England look, she asked him, as she had asked him long ago?

It was too grey, too wet, too cold. She knew all that without his saying it. But it was warm in here, he said. She always had such wonderful fires.

She knelt on the rug to stir it. She had a passion for poking fires—a misguided passion, Godfrey had said. . . . adding, 'There, I knew you'd do it,' when the log fell out, scattering little scraps of fire. 'Don't encourage her, Alan,' as he bent to help her. 'Better let her learn her lesson. I spend my life sweeping up after her. And if I'm not here, some day, she'll set the house on fire.'

She had looked at him with wide eyes. 'If you were not here Godfrey If you were not here' She had laughed softly over the absurdity of it, the picture of herself poking the fire without Godfrey. And she and Alan swept the hearth tidy together.

'I'd send for Alan then,' she said happily. 'If you were not here, Godfrey'

He had looked at her lazily from the depths of his chair. 'Yes, send for Alan,' he had said.

Stirring the fire, she looked at Alan over her shoulder. She was stirring it to warm him because he was cold. He sat in Godfrey's chair holding his glass as though his hands were cold and the glass might warm them. She tried to make him look at her, but he was staring down at the amber liquid moving a little in the light between his hands. He shadowed it with one hand, taking the other away, watched the light come and go through it. He did not look at Mary who knelt by the fire, the poker still between her fingers watching him.

But Stella would have slipped away before this and they

would not have noticed her going. She would sit in the firelight in her own room which had once been a loft and had still the sloping roof of one, thinking of David, building herself some security with the thought of David who was hers. Because downstairs when those two were together she was shut outside from an experience she had not shared. But she had gone, she thought, some way at least, along the road with David until he was killed and the road ended.

The firelight flickering on the sloping ceiling made her think of Cappagh. She saw the dining-room at Cappagh with the windows open, the paths growing paler outside, the long path under her bedroom window running to the stable yard, grey, black shadowed. She heard something move in the stables Only a horse asleep on his feet, moving and sleeping again She heard nothing else, although there had been many things to hear, those nights when soldiers sat at dinner in the dining-room, and wounded rebels hid in the stable loft, their blood staining the hay

She heard the door open presently and close again; footsteps in the little narrow lane that led to the street. The sound troubled her a little People who had been in the War walked in the same way, with the same step, as though they had learned to walk in some special school. Going downstairs she found Mary, sitting alone, staring into the fire.

'Is that Stella? Why did you go away?'

But she did not turn her head, staring into the fire, hiding the trouble in her face, and thinking of Godfrey lying under some quiet sky, thanking God that Godfrey had never been a prisoner. Stella sat in the chair which Alan had left so recently that it was still warm, as though he was keeping it warm in case Godfrey should come. She blinked before the bright light after the dimness in which she had sat upstairs, thinking how empty and quiet the room seemed now that Alan had gone.

Chapter 30

THE NURSERY at Winds remained as a secure thing in an insecure world. It was still a place to go to for comfort, sure of finding comfort there. But Mary standing in the nursery, afraid of Nanny as they all were, and a little more afraid now, feeling Nanny might not understand the thing she would know one of these days, thought the nursery seemed sad and empty. She heard Michael's voice under the window. He was growing into a schoolboy, she said, and he would be going to school soon, and it was sad, wasn't it, when the only child went away? And the nursery was empty. Nurseries ought to be full . . . little heads sitting round the table, bent over books or about the fire. Or tossed heads on pillows, dark or fair, and small curved cheeks all looking so ridiculously the same . . . didn't they? She saw the cold stiffness of Nanny's apron and did not dare to cross the room to her. But when Nanny turned, the firelight caught it and made it rosy, lit the glasses of Nanny's spectacles like small kind lamps. They were dim lamps now and she could not see Mary standing in the shadowy room, but she never spoke of that. She had said only a little time ago, to Cynthia:

'If I was twenty years younger now,' and her thin breast ached for the feeling of a child's head against it. But she thought, it wasn't her age. She felt as well as ever, but she had to be more and more careful remembering things painfully, where they were and where they ought to be, so that she might find them without seeing. It made her nervous. She had nightmares sometimes of children stumbling too near the fire, and she not able to find them.

'We'll have a young nurse to do all the work,' Cynthia had said. 'And we'll call him David.' She turned her head away a little because her eyes were wet. It was strange that

her eyes should be wet after all this time.

Michael was growing big, Nanny agreed, a schoolboy, growing beyond anything she could do for him. And she saw the two small beds either side of her, where David and Stella had slept. But Cynthia was going to want her, Mary said comforting her.

'That'll be soon now,' Nanny said, her face peaceful, her breast warm under the cold stiffness of her apron. Mary, looking at her, remembered the things they had done together. Would Nanny one of these days understand that she didn't love Godfrey or Michael less, but rather more—that she was keeping faith with Godfrey in a way, saving someone else from something terrible that she hardly understood. Only that he needed her, more perhaps than Godfrey had ever needed her, and one of these days there would be children perhaps at Winds again. When she had to face Nanny, she would bribe her silently with that, saying nothing.

Sometime that year Stella met Severn at a dance at Aldershot to which she had gone with Guy Loring who had survived the War and was still a soldier. He said resentfully, 'There's a fellow here, Severn, who says he knows you . . . or ought to know you. You've probably heard of him,' he added grudgingly because Severn was still famous in the regiment although less and less famous as they got back to pre-War conditions and more and more people came from Sandhurst who had never touched the War.

She was introduced to Severn and danced with him. He wasn't she thought at all like what she had expected. She looked at him as she danced—seeing him at Boisville where she knew he and Goff had hated each other; afterwards in prison where sometimes, she knew, he and Goff must have looked at each other as prisoners look—trying to see him, icy cold and fearless under fire.

He was cold now, a thin dull man, she thought, looking like everyone else in the room with that small soldier's

moustache. If he hadn't been taken prisoner, that time, Goff had said, he would have finished the War as a Brigadier. Now he was a Captain again and had just married on a Captain's pay and allowances a pretty fluffy girl of eighteen who made Stella feel a hundred.

They sat out, and he said: 'I knew your brother.'

'Yes.' She sat with her hand in her lap waiting, watching him. It was like bringing David to life again, hearing something new of him, when everything known had inevitably become stale. When he talked of David, he would live again for just a little while. He had been with David in those towns and villages of which she had never known the names, and their namelessness had left them with David's last weeks alive, unreal, so that for her the road really broke in two when he went to France. And she was cut off from him now by her experiences which he had not shared, wondering often what he would have been like now, and if she too would have been different if he had lived. And what would he have thought about this? She wondered often, trying to discover how he would have felt, so that loyally, she might feel the same. And, as she grew older, she passed David by, because he had been killed when he was just nineteen, so now she was older than he was which was strange too. Often she tried to reach him. People said you could communicate with the dead. But he was lost . . . in some wood . . . and she could not find him, could not discover at all what he would have been like now. He might have changed, she thought once, because so many other people had changed. She asked Nancy Creagh. If you had loved a person terribly and they went away and came back quite different, would it matter? Could you stop loving them?

Nancy had answered in a great hurry as if Stella had frightened her. Oh no, nothing could make any difference. You would go on loving the person you once knew and forgiving everything that this stranger did. Stella, thinking

of Guy who was easier with everyone in the world than with his mother, knew that David too would have been changed Somewhere in that nameless country and that nameless road it would have happened And she thought if she followed the road that David had gone, from Étaples to Doullens, from Doullens to Boisville and south when it was spring, she would have known. But there would be nothing to forgive if he had come back different as everyone else had come (and they *would* think that it was people at home that had changed) She would have kept him as he had been in childhood because nothing could ever alter that or be the same after. But he might have gone further away, living, she realised dimly, the reticences of brother and sister making a wider valley each year.

Talking to Severn, she thought, those towns and villages and the sites where towns and villages had once been, might lose their namelessness, become living and kind. And she would learn something about David, which she had never known, something new. Because Severn with Goff had lived with David in those villages without names So that life there might meet death at least on equal terms He had spoken of Goff She knew him? He hadn't seen him since he came back from India where he had been with the second battalion. And how was old Goff now? he asked. He and Goff had once hated each other until their common experience drew them together, as though they passed each other in the night going up and down. 'Who are you . . . chum?' 'How are things up there now, chum?'

But he hadn't seen Goff for some time now because their friendship had no other roots, and Severn besides was newly married.

She brought him back from Goff to talk of David. And she waited patiently, holding her breath in suspense lest she should miss anything, and he might from her experience of men who had been in the War, be stupid and unable to find the thing lost, for her again.

He was slow, she thought, slower than Francis. And she remembered that he too, had been a prisoner. And she thought 'When will he begin?' and heard the music start, in despair.

He only said, staring before her at a little forest of palms: 'I taught him to drink,' and chuckled a little, seeing something she could not see.

It struck her faintly that it was an odd thing for him to say, meeting her for the first time and talking to her of David who was dead. He turned a dull face to her. He could remember nothing more. 'You're like him,' he said vaguely and she knew he wasn't really interested. And a certain doubt came to his face when he had said it. Because perhaps she wasn't really like him. It was so long ago and he had forgotten so much.

'You don't remember him very well, I suppose?' She pressed one cold hand against another. David was dead then. They couldn't bring him to life again.

'Not very well. It's so long since . . .' and suddenly as he looked at her, she knew how much he had forgotten. He had not hesitated, stumbling like those others, afraid to ask. In a moment he would say 'I hope he's well. Give my love to him.' And she would have to tell him, shouting perhaps above the music, that David had been killed. He heard the music too with relief. 'Shall we go in?'

They went, through the little forest of palms, touching them. He did not think of fighting in some wood when it was May and the young leaves hid guns and ammunition and men, spreading a pale screen over them. They met the others at the ballroom door. He danced with his wife again, looking down at her, very much in love. He was on his honeymoon.

Stella went to Heystead and hunted with Francis and asked Cynthia when she was going to begin again and Cynthia said watching small David, that next year, she really would. And she knew she was lazy, and she was so

glad that Stella was here to go out with Francis. So Stella got up in the winter morning and put on her riding clothes with cold stiff hands and felt again sick with excitement and was out in the yard walking a cold, impatient horse up and down waiting for Francis. She was always early, waiting for Francis Cynthia came out with David and saw them go, and said she felt envious and next year she'd really begin again. Stella made a little circle round the yard which had been full so long of the sound of hoofs on cobblestones as she went round and round, waiting for Francis. She waved her whip to Cynthia. 'Wish you were coming, Cynthie,' and rode out of the grey yard into sudden sunlight

She and Francis came home together, tired and silent, splashing through the muddy lanes as the light faded and a long streak of yellow in the sky was reflected in the puddles They took a short cut across a marshy field, the horses' feet squelching in and out of it, opened a gate, and came on to the road again The country was too wet and there was promise of more rain. Half the valley would be under water if it went on, Francis said, turning to look back at the sky behind them from which direction the wind was coming. They rode down hill between black dripping hedges and climbed again. The hedges growing lower showed grey-green winter fields stretching away to the darkness of woods. Here and there floods lay in the fields catching the reflection of the sky. All the way there went with them the steady peaceful sound of tired horses walking, in and out of mud, splashing in and out of puddles, stumbling once.

'He-up Jupiter.' Francis sitting in the saddle stared at the puddles and said it reminded him of France, and he rode as men, stiff and cold, had ridden then; and his voice speaking to Stella seemed different and his shoulders bent under the burden of his weariness reminded her of someone, something.

'It takes you back,' he said, his voice waking the quietness of the road between the wet hedges, and she agreed, that it took you back.

Then spring came, and the horses were put out to grass and Francis watched his horses feeding and his grass growing and never left Heystead even to go to London, and asked why on earth anyone should go there if they could help it? There was plenty to do, he said to Mrs. Oliver who had come over one afternoon to tea. He stood on his own avenue saying it, with Sam and the new spaniel and the terriers at his heels. The terriers wandered as was their own way and he shouted to them and they crept back to him full of guilt. Mrs. Oliver who was a country woman said she knew there was always plenty to do. And the dogs too, she said, trying to count them and losing count because they would move, and beginning again—took a lot of time, didn't they?

Not the dogs, Francis said. Because they were always there. He looked down at them and they turned adoring faces to him. He didn't give any special time to the dogs because they were always with him, just always there.

In May, Stella left Cynthia content with small David and her garden and Francis with his dogs and his fields and went to Cappagh. She stayed with Mary on the way and lunched with Maurice Liddell who was home from somewhere too after nearly four years. It was comforting that a lot of people were coming home who had gone away immediately after the War. Maurice Liddell sitting down, said to her almost at once across the table, 'Well,' and she knew what that 'Well,' meant before he asked about Cynthia and Francis.

She smiled a little. 'It isn't very polite to me,' she thought, and how much she had been in love with him when she had been at school and how jealous she had made Margery with his chocolates. Margery had married one of her

many subalterns last year. Or perhaps it wasn't one of those, but some new one.

'You've come from Heystead haven't you?' Maurice Liddell said, and was interrupted. 'What will you eat?'

'Choose for me'

'That's weak-minded of you. . . . But Cynthia always does it too. You're getting like her, you know.'

'Thank you.'

'When you smile like that . . .' He stared at her. That smile which they all had. 'But you've no need to look like that,' he said hurriedly, almost angrily. She smiled again, the shadow lying over her face.

'Does the smile belong only to Cynthia?' How mean men were to women they weren't in love with. He looked at her as she had once looked in a mirror, seeing Cynthia. Her life was like that. She could only look always over Cynthia's shoulder into a mirror, and the mirror did not show her her own face, because she wasn't old enough or young enough and must live always in a No Man's Land left by the War with a country on either side that was not hers. She looked at Maurice Liddell and thought how she had once kept his letters under her pillow, putting out her hand in the night to feel them, had held them against her face, faintly sick because they smelt of the War. It wasn't Maurice, she told herself, looking at him, but only the War. She couldn't have looked at him like this now, otherwise. And he was growing a little bald. She could see that when he bent his head. She was suddenly pleased because he was growing bald.

. She had come from Heystead, she said. They had sent him a lot of messages. They said, come at once, although there was nothing to do. Francis said he had chosen a bad time for his leave. There was fishing, of course. If he liked fishing. Or golf? she put in maliciously.

'Did Francis suggest golf?'

'No.' That had been her idea. She thought he might

A man standing on the path where the moss grew inches deep after long winters and summers of rain, turned as though he had been waiting for her.

'You haven't seen me,' he said, barring her path. 'You haven't seen me now. . . .'

'I haven't seen you,' she repeated obediently staring at the thing in his hand. There was earth on the muzzle this time So it *had* been buried, and dug up.

His gloomy eyes blazed at her. 'If you haven't seen me. . . . I'll let you go.'

His face had caught the darkness of the woods, mysterious and menacing. His long thin body stooped a little as though under a burden. He moved the thing in his hand foolishly.

She thought, a little sick, 'It'll go off in a minute,' and thought of all the people who loved her, the number of these seeming exaggerated as it does at such a time. And would Alan Goff mind a little when she was found dead in this wood? The darkness closed over her. The trees were shadows moving, shutting her in so that she could not escape.

He was part of the shadows He slipped into them and she was alone He came back, his feet noiseless on the thick moss—there must be inches of it, she thought absently—'You haven't seen me now.'

Why, she thought vaguely, did he then thrust his face again and again into hers? . . . So that she must know it anywhere, must carry the memory of it with her, all her life. For only once in a lifetime surely, could such a thing happen, that one should be caught and trapped in some wood? Oh no, she hadn't seen him. Only her basket of fish at which she was staring foolishly, holding it in her hand. She was alone. He went through the woods so quietly as a countryman goes. No branch snapped or sighed, or bent back, to let him pass. No old last year's leaf crackled under his feet. Only townsmen went clumsily as Denis Wilmot

had gone two years ago, breaking through the quietness of the woods.

She brought the fish in, and they had it for dinner, sitting half in twilight, half in candlelight. The house was very quiet, waiting and listening. Should she say anything? But the house knew, she thought. And it would make no difference. And she hadn't seen him, she had said obediently, while he watched her with those gloomy eyes. She looked over her shoulder. Was he out there now, waiting and listening? Outside the paths grew paler and it would be fine to-morrow, Nancy thought, and was almost sure she could smell the roses, the first roses wet with this morning's rain.

The shadows lengthening, made the rabbits bolder, tearing her garden to pieces, tiny shadows lost among shadows. Once Nancy moved, her eyes wide beyond the candlelight. The lake, full now to the banks, lay quiet, guarding its secret. But she thought she heard something. It would be Cooperstown to-night, she thought. It had been Mallagh last week and what a bonfire Mallagh had made against the sky. She couldn't think why. They had burned it before Cooperstown, but you never know what They'd do or why They did it. They were only making a bonfire perhaps. It was intoxicating for schoolboys, this game of making a bonfire night after night. And what bonfires these houses made, blazing against the darkness of the woods. The rain coming after Mallagh had been burned, had filled the air with the smell of water thrown on ashes. They had gone over to look at it in the morning when it was still smouldering. Now and again a bit of the roof fell in or a blackened wall crumbled. Otherwise it was so quiet that they could hear nothing, except the fountain still playing in the formal garden under the drawing-room window. The fountain played joyously in the sunlight after the rain, all the colours of the rainbow caught into it, while the house smoked and smouldered.

At Langfield earlier, the grandsons of the house, home for the Easter holidays, had been out on the roof putting out the fire. It was the best holiday excitement they had ever had. Some of the house had been saved at Langfield where the raiders had done their work only half-heartedly. One of them had slipped back to a schoolboy and whispered in his ear. 'You'll watch the rick in the yard, Master Jack. If it should catch the rick there'd be no saving the stables. Sure we had to do it...' He had vanished into the darkness before the boy could be sure of a face and a voice he knew. But they had saved the rick and the stables, and were living in them now.

Nancy thought, sitting in the candlelight smelling her roses, they must go upstairs soon and look from the highest window, across the country to see if Cooperstown to-night lit a torch for all the countryside to see. And there was Castle Shaw and she hoped Sir Martin wouldn't do anything foolish...: being old and peppery...argue with them perhaps. It was no use arguing. And after all, it wasn't as if Michael had lived to come after him, or if there were any grandsons at Castle Shaw to get up on the roof to put out the fire. She sat, leaning back, as Edmund Urquhart had seen her, the pale dusk behind her, caught somehow into her hair. She dreamed a little, smelling her roses. She was sure she could smell them. How wonderfully those new roses smelt for all Sir Martin's conservatism—wet after this morning's rain.

The rabbits tearing her garden to pieces and playing games on the lawn were suddenly still, frightened shadows. They fled before darker shadows coming from the woods.

'Have you got it ready now? Whisht, not before I tell you. Are you there Peter Murphy? You know the place, you say.' Peter Murphy stood where the woods hid him, and looked up at the house. It lay quiet and still in the May dusk, a long grey wall, pale beyond the darkness of the woods, like a house asleep.

'Aye, I know it.'

'They'll be in the dining-room still,' he thought, seeing the yellow candlelight stream out through the open window across a bed of wallflowers. He smelt the wallflowers as he went past the beds which he had weeded as a boy, under the cross old gardener's eye. He stood under the wall of the house and stared up at it. It lay quiet and unsuspecting, looking kindly and secure in sleep. It had been kind.

'Are you there?' Peter Murphy, who had known that kindness, whispered over his shoulder to a man behind him. 'I'll show you now.'

That night Cappagh lit a torch for the countryside. And how it burnt against the darkness of the woods, the fire-light creeping into every glade where small living things fled before it. It burnt easily, as though there had not been long wet winters followed by long wet summers to drench the walls through.

The flames leaping up, when it was too late to save anything more—they had saved a few things and left those they most wanted to save—spread through the long corridors into the room where Edmund Urquhart had stood before the War trying to define the smell of Irish country houses faintly sad, as though they waited for this. They filled too, the room where Irene's face had glimmered back from the mirror, pale and beautiful, as Stella had seen it, looking always over someone's shoulder into a mirror; and downstairs, they caught Hubert's portrait and the portrait of Philip who had sat up in France talking of Ireland for the whole of one night before he died.

They watched from Castle Shaw and from Cooperstown, through a gap in the trees that shut in all these houses. The branches of those trees that made a barrier, softened against the summer night sky. There would be, as Irene had thought, for the next generation, no world between two worlds, but only Ireland. And none of this really concerned them, because they had spent everything in the War and

so for all their lives afterwards must lie on the bank watching the stream of life go by, unable to go with it or to discover clearly where it went. They watched from Cooperstown (because it was too far and too late to help and useless anyhow to try and put out Their fire) until the watching hurt their eyes and they looked away, waiting for to-morrow night or the next night when it would be their turn.

In the grey dawn when Cappagh lay, a pile of blackened ruins smoking under the sky, the rabbits crept out and had their own way, with no one to disturb them, in Nancy's garden.

THE END

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